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THE GOSPEL MIRACLES

AN ESSAY

WITH TWO APPENDICES

BY

J. R. ILLINGWORTH, M.A., D.D.

"Omni miraculo quod fit per hominem, majus miraculum est homo."
S. AUGUSTINE.

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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PREFACE

Some apology may seem to be needed for venturing to publish anything fresh at the present time. But the following pages were written, before the cloud of war came over us, with reference to a discussion which had then for some time been going on. And the subject with which they deal may, I hope, be deemed to justify their appearance. For the war is imperatively calling all of us to be more earnest in our religion ; and many who once seemed deaf to it are answering the call. And our practical religion is so closely connected with our creed that the defence of an important element in the latter may not, after all, be at such a time inopportune. The essay, then, is an attempt to vindicate the occurrence of the gospel miracles as being intrinsically congruous with the Incarnation, considered as the great enfranchisement of human life by its deliverance

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from the slavery to sin. And I have endeavoured to emphasize the extreme extent to which sin has altered the proportionate relation between necessity and freedom in human character and conduct; and, in consequence, the degree to which it has distorted the intellectual picture of that relation which the world would otherwise have presented to the mind; with the result that our mental judgments, founded as they are on this distorted picture, cannot enable us to criticize correctly the history of a sinless being whose purpose, upon earth, was to make men free.

I have added, by way of appendices, two papers, originally read at Birmingham, which further illustrate and emphasize important points in the essay.

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CHAPTER I

NECESSITY THE BASIS OF FREEDOM

"NOTHING that goes on in the world," says St. Augustine, "is so wonderful as the existence of the world itself—the heavens and the earth, and all that they contain. . . . And though the miracles of everyday occurrence have grown cheap from their familiarity, when wisely regarded they are seen to be greater than the unusual and the rare. For assuredly man is a greater wonder than any wonder which he ever worked."[1]

These words contain a warning, which it is well to bear in mind, in entering upon any discussion of the vexed question of miracles. For we are too apt to think that we have sufficiently explained an unusual event when we have assimilated it to our ordinary experience.

[1] *De Civ. Dei*, x. 12.

Whereas that experience itself is but a luminous point amid an ocean of surrounding darkness. It gives no account whatever of its own origin or end. But we habitually ignore this fact. We have grown so accustomed to ourselves that we forget our ultimate need of explanation. Why are we subjects of experience at all, or, in other words, why do we exist? Now, if the Christian revelation be true, it is an answer to this question, and an answer that we could never have otherwise obtained. And if it is, and to the extent that it is an answer and an explanation, it must come from outside our ordinary experience, which is the question, the thing to be answered, the thing to be explained. Hence if we could succeed in the attempt to assimilate it to our ordinary experience, we should not thereby explain it, as some people seem to think, in the very smallest degree; but only bring it within the category of things still needing explanation. For it would cease to be an answer and become simply a fresh instance and a further complication of the original question—"Why hast Thou made me thus?"—the solution of which, whatever it be, must certainly be extraordinary.

The familiar objection to miracles, as involving,

in Hume's phrase, a violation of the laws of nature, really dates from that mechanical view of the material world which was emphasized, in what is commonly called the beginning of modern philosophy, by Descartes. Descartes separated spirit and matter with a completeness which involved his followers in hopeless difficulty how to account for the actual fact of their concomitant operation. And, further, he regarded all movements of matter as purely mechanical in origin, to the extent even of suggesting that animal life was automatic. The rigidity which this view must give to what we call the laws of nature is obvious; but it was not Descartes but his follower Spinoza whose development of this consequence was theologically most influential.

God, in the system of Spinoza, is the absolutely infinite being or substance, known to us under the two attributes of thought and extension. His activity flows from the inner necessity of His nature, and is free only in the sense of being unimpeded. For "He acts by the same necessity whereby He understands Himself," and "His will and intellect are the same thing." "Consequently the universal laws of nature are decrees of God which follow from the necessity and

perfection of His own being." Hence "nature always observes laws and rules, though they may not be all known to us, which involve eternal necessity and truth, and so preserves a fixed and immutable order" of which "God is the immanent, but not the transcendent cause." "Man is a part of nature," and therefore determined by a like necessity. "No man wills or does anything but what God has decreed from eternity that he should will or do."

In one of his earlier writings Spinoza expresses himself with some ambiguity on the subject of human freedom; but in the Ethics, which represents his maturest thought, we are told that "the mind is determined to will this or that by a cause, which again is determined by another cause, and this by another, and so on to infinity." Accordingly "men are deceived in thinking themselves free; which opinion simply arises from the fact that they are conscious of their actions, but ignorant of the causes by which they are determined." This is further confirmed when he says, "By will I understand the faculty whereby the mind affirms or denies truth or falsehood, and not the desire wherewith it seeks or avoids things." In short, "will and intellect are one and the

same." "And the free man is the man who is led by pure reason." Such an one knows and therefore loves God with an intellectual love (*amor intellectualis*) which in turn is "part of the infinite love wherewith God loves Himself."

When asked why all men were not created with an equal capacity for this condition, Spinoza's answer is frankly deterministic. "God had material enough for everything" (*non defuit ei materia ad omnia*) "which an infinite intellect could conceive from the highest to the lowest degree of perfection." And to the further question, "Why, then, are the impious punished, since they act according to their nature and the divine decree?" he answers, "Their punishment is part of the same decree . . . as men exterminate poisonous serpents who are noxious from their nature, and cannot be otherwise."

But man is too insignificant a part of nature to be the final cause of any divine action, either providential or miraculous. "It is mere vulgar ignorance that conceives God as a lawgiver, or ruler, intervening in human affairs; or even as being just or merciful to man." What men call providence is nothing but the order of nature; and a miracle is merely a natural event, of which we do not know

the cause; the very supposition of any interference with the fixed order of nature being absurd.

Spinoza was probably, in his own eyes, a Theist, rather than a pantheist; and at times uses language that is very susceptible of a really religious interpretation. "His foot," says Matthew Arnold, "was in the *vera vita*, his eye on the beatific vision." And so may it, in fact, have been. But his system, in so far as it is consistent, has been rightly regarded as pantheistic, for it allows no truly moral freedom either to God or man.

This fact led Leibniz, his younger contemporary, to formulate his well-known monadology or doctrine of monads; a monad meaning an individual unextended substance, capable of action. "For if we deprive things of the power of action (*vis agendi*) we can no longer distinguish them from the divine substance, and must lapse into Spinozism." Whereas, in fact, "there are as many veritable substances as there are monads, in place of Spinoza's one substance." To call these monads atoms would suggest misleading, because material associations. They are spoken of as "points of substance," and "substance is a being capable of action." Hence we might better describe them as punctual centres of energy,

having each a spontaneity (*spontanéité*) of its own, as well as "something analogous to feeling and appetite." These monads "have no windows," that is, they are determined by their own inner nature, and not by influences from without. They may have suggested the thought in Browning's *Paracelsus*:

> Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
> From outward things, whate'er you may believe;
> There is an inmost centre in us all
> Where truth abides in fulness; . . .
> . . . . . and to KNOW,
> Rather consists in opening out a way
> Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
> Than in effecting entry for a light
> Supposed to be without."

The monads radiate (*par des fulgurations*) from God, who is the primal monad, and eminent among them is the human soul, which is essentially free, in the sense of being capable of self-determination, and is governed by God as its king.

We need not pause on the general philosophy of Leibniz, which like other systems of Thought has "had its day and ceased to be." Our only object is to emphasize the point that he taught the reality, the independence, the spontaneity, the self-determination of the individual, in conscious and

deliberate protest against the pantheistic absolutism of Spinoza. For this protest is of permanent value, and as regards the human soul at least may be repeated *mutatis mutandis* at the present day. We speak nowadays of persons instead of monads; but the reality and spontaneity and self-determination of the individual person is as important as ever to maintain. And it must have been from personal introspection that the whole monadology arose. For the only monad that Leibniz could know was himself, and by legitimate analogy all other selves; since it is only in our own case that we can get at first hand behind the scenes of life. The rest is a moving panorama, which might, for all that we could otherwise tell, be as rigidly determined as Spinoza thought. But in my own case I can look behind the mere outward appearances that meet the eye. My body is part of the moving panorama, and, just because it is so, I can in that one point test the interior nature, not indeed of the whole, but of a very important portion of the whole. And at this one point, where I can look behind the panorama, I find that its movement is not determined by mechanism from without, but by will from within, circumscribed indeed by a hundred external limita-

tions, but with enough power of "free determination 'twixt right and wrong," as Shakespeare puts it, to make all the difference between a sinner and a saint. And practically I know the same to be the case with other men. They have the power of choice, and are to that extent free. There is therefore behind one section of the world's mechanism, namely, the human section, freewill. And many at the present day are disposed to recognize with Leibniz a degree of spontaneity which is the lesser analogue of this freedom far down if not throughout the entire range of organic life.

While at the other end of the scale we are compelled to argue that in a world where freedom exists, God, its creator, must be supremely free. And what this should mean we may see by examining the case of human freedom.

Man, we say, in however restricted a sense, is essentially free. What then is the true and proper use, the reasonable and, in that sense, the natural use of his freedom? To do right, and by continually so doing to become good; that is, to fashion for himself a certain character. But what is a character? A collection of habits. And what is a habit? A tendency always to do the same

thing in the same way; a uniformity of conduct. Thus to form a good character is to create for oneself uniformities of right action. And when we say that a good man is absolutely to be depended upon, we mean that he will not fail us by any lapse from the uniform tenor of his ways. In a word, his conduct can be predicted. But such a character as this can only, under our present conditions, be created by numerous and often painful acts of choice or freewill, grimly reiterated through weary years. Thus the will, because it is free and by the direct use of its freedom, establishes its own apparent opposite, that is, uniform laws of conduct. But these laws do not therefore limit the freedom of the character which they form. On the contrary, they only liberate energy for further free use, since the man who is no longer obliged to consume his energy within himself, in the struggle to shape his character, is thenceforth ready to do free work for the wider world,—write his poem, paint his picture, advance his science, teach, preach, govern, fulfil his function in whatever it consists. And not only so, but the habits themselves, which are the condition of this fuller freedom, from the very fact that they were not imposed by

necessity from without, but created by freedom from within, still remain within the range of the will which created them, and can be modified as occasion requires. The good man will not of course depart from the goodness of his conduct, but he may arrest the uniformity of the way in which it appears; and in so doing perform an action which could not have been previously predicted.

> Does he paint? he fain would write a poem.
> Does he write? he fain would paint a picture.
> . . . . . .
> Once, and only once, and for one only.[1]

And so the "people of importance" who broke in upon Dante were surprised to find a painter, not the poet.

On this analogy, we should regard the uniformity of what we call the laws of nature as due not to the necessity of the divine nature, but to the consistency of the divine will. Order, regularity, method, are the obviously indispensable conditions of all stable existence, as well as of all rational life. And however freely God were to be conceived of as acting in creation, He would act in an orderly way. He would create

[1] Browning, "One Word More."

a universe with a character, that is with habits, that is with uniformities of action.

There cannot be the faintest reason, therefore, for arguing from the existence of such uniformities that the creative will behind them is not free, and therefore able, at least, to modify His own modes of operation.

Moreover, there is something further analogous in nature to what we observed in man. We saw that in man the uniformity of habit coexists with the free activity which it subserves and enables. So in nature the uniformity coexists with and ministers to variety. The life of each new day, as Bergson has reminded us, is a fresh creation, and insensible variation is for ever going on. The common characteristics of humanity are, broadly speaking, uniform; but each generation which they produce has its "peculiar difference" from all that went before it, as well as each individual man. And had we sufficient insight we should probably see the same to be the case at least throughout the whole region of organic life. No tree or flower accurately reproduces its parental form. No animal is an exact copy of another. We can predicate uniformity of their common attributes considered in abstraction, but

the individual is always new, with a trace of the spontaneity which Leibniz noted.

The brevity of human life and human experience must also be remembered. These uniform laws, as we call them, though they are always being modified, change so little in a few centuries that their alteration is imperceptible to us. We see so small an arc of so great a circle that it looks like a straight line. But had we the mind to which a thousand years are as one day this would be otherwise, and the proportion which uniformity bears to variation would be immensely diminished. While further we must bear in mind that the vastly greater part of the universe is known to us only on its mechanical side. We see only the mechanism, and chemistry of the sidereal system, and nothing of the free life with which it must indubitably teem. And this fact cannot fail to give a bias to our imagination, further distorting our view of the proportion which mechanism bears to freedom, in the totality of things. Mrs. Browning speaks with proper scorn of the man

> who lives by diagrams,
> And crosses out the spontaneities
> Of all his individual personal life
> With formal universals,

and then goes on to ask :

> What, if even God
> Were chiefly God by living out Himself
> To an individualism of the Infinite,
> Eterne, intense, profuse,—still throwing up
> The golden spray of multitudinous worlds
> In measure to the proclive weight and rush
> Of His inner nature—the spontaneous love
> Still proof and outflow of spontaneous life ? [1]

But introspection shows us more than the mere fact of our freedom. It discloses the moral law, which declares that such and such things are right and therefore I ought to do them—the law of conscience. The content of this law has confessedly varied with the degree of enlightenment attained by a society or an individual, but its form or framework, the sense of obligation, or judgment of oughtness is practically universal in the human race. And this moral law, this obligation to do right, is plainly, as Butler calls it, the law of our nature ; the law, that is, by obeying which, our whole being moves in the direction to which reason points, and is proportionately satisfied.[2] But the same act of introspection that discloses this law makes me also aware that I often disobey it ; and the same I know to be the case

[1] "Aurora Leigh." [2] See Appendix I.

with other men. And the result of this disobedience actually is, within the region of its occurrence, that is the world of man, what I can picture that the breach of any of the physical laws of nature would be in their respective spheres. If the law of gravitation, for instance, or the regular transmission of light or heat should cease to operate, the immediate consequence would be cosmic disorder, disaster, catastrophe. And such is precisely what has resulted from man's transgression of the moral law. He has in virtue of his freedom broken the one law of nature that he can break; namely, the specific law which governs freedom in the only way in which freedom, as such, can be governed. And alas! there is little need to describe the result. For we feel it within us and see it around us every day of our lives;—all the functions of the individual disordered, all the relations of society disturbed, and the condition of mankind, in consequence, chaotic, confused, degraded, hopelessly remote from all that it ideally might have been. We have sufficient evidence, in the lives of saintly and heroic characters, of what human nature is capable of becoming,—internally harmonious, externally beneficent, an instrument,

a temple, a revelation of God. And when we contrast this demonstrably possible condition with the low level, not of its extreme opposite, but even of average humanity, we have sufficient measure of the depth and distance of man's fall, that is of his misuse of his freewill.[1]

This again is one of those facts that is too familiar to cause us wonder. Yet, on reflection, it is seen to be, as has often been pointed out, a miracle, and the only miracle in the objectionable sense of the word—the real breach not of a physical law, but of what we may truly call a natural law, as being the proper law of our own nature, the way, that is, in which God wills that we should act. And this constitutes as real a contradiction of the divine will as if we were, *per impossibile*, to break a physical law, like that of gravitation. Moreover, though we cannot break the laws of the physical world, we can, within limits, control their operation, by our freewill, and consequently alter their effect. We can determine, for example, whether electricity or dynamite shall be used to promote the welfare or to wreck the lives of men. It follows that whenever we break the moral law we, in one degree or another,

[1] See Appendix II.

misdirect the operations of physical law, to the extent in which they affect our own bodies, causing them to issue in a totally different result from what they would naturally have had if the moral law had never been broken. This is of course only too obvious in the case of all forms of sensuality and sloth. But it is not the less true of the more spiritual sins, like anger, envy, jealousy, avarice, discontent; they all have, in the long run, a fatal reaction upon the bodily life, and throw its delicate mechanism out of gear. And when we reflect how these evil influences have been ramifying, accumulating, transmitting their malign inheritance of vitiated bodies and disordered brains, age after age throughout human history, we realize how profoundly man's freewill has deranged the condition of what to him is the most important part of the physical order of the world.

Thus the picture which the world presents to us is not the Spinozistic picture, with its ruthless reign of inexorable law, and relentless predestination of men to fall or rise and fare accordingly. On the contrary, it is one in which law is subordinate to freedom. Every day is a new creation, and brings fresh individuals into being,

which vary however slightly from all that went before them, and modify to that extent the law of their kind, till in the end new species are evolved or created, and again new individuals within those species. While man, with all his limitations, is free to determine his own character, between poles of sin and sanctity which are immeasurably apart; and in so doing to modify the effect of physical law upon his bodily organism. And as a result of habitually misusing this freedom, in a greater or lesser degree, he has disordered and disorganized the whole of his personal, social and political life, together with all the physical conditions with which that life is immediately connected, and is far more enslaved by necessity than he would otherwise have been.

CHAPTER II

THE RESURRECTION

The world then of our experience is not one in which iron law for ever overrides individuality; but on the contrary one where law is the condition of liberty, matter the minister of spirit, necessity subservient to freedom. And there is in reality no more striking illustration of this than the very fact that man has been made capable of breaking, and has in consequence actually broken the fundamental law of his own nature. For it is a measure of the importance of freewill in the scheme of creation that even at such a cost it should be given to man. And, however mysterious the whole subject, we can at least see plainly that without that gift human life could have had no moral or spiritual value, and must have remained, in its essence, merely animal. For only virtue that has come of struggle, only love that is freely given, only character that is the exhibition of what

we have deliberately willed to be, can possibly possess for us ethical interest, or spiritual worth. This is not a fact to be argued; it is our immediate and instinctive judgment; it is involved in the very meaning of the words goodness, and love and truth.

But even so, we cannot conceive that God would have endowed man with this awful capacity unless secure of His own ability, if we may so speak, to guide it ultimately aright, and restore the broken law of His creation. Hence the Incarnation and consequent Atonement not only meets man's most momentous practical need, but also, by so doing, points to the solution of his supreme speculative difficulty. For it shows us this process of restoration, actually at work in the present world, and is prophetic of its eventual completion.

And the Incarnation means, according to the creed of the Church, that Jesus Christ was a new fact in human history—"the Word made flesh," "the Lord from heaven," "the second Adam" who "took our nature upon Him," and thereby initiated a new order of humanity,—what might be called, by a biological metaphor, a new species of man. For "as many as received Him, to

them gave He the right to become children of God . . . which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." For "if any man be in Christ he is a new creature."

And this novelty is the very key-note of the gospel. It is "a new doctrine," "the new testament," "a new commandment," "new cloth," "new wine," "a new and living way"; and it leads to the "new Jerusalem," the "new heavens and new earth," where the "new name" is to be written, and the "new song" is to be sung, when "He that sat upon the throne" shall have made all things new.

Now the first appearance of this novelty in history is the human life of Jesus of Nazareth, recorded in the gospels. He claimed to be sinless in the midst of a sinful world: "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" He claimed to have "done among them the works which none other did"; while His enemies admitted that "never man so spake." He claimed with authority to innovate upon the moral legislation of the past. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time . . . but I say unto you." He claimed, to the astonishment of His hearers, the "power

on earth to forgive sins." Finally, He claimed the personal allegiance of men. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Learn of me;" "Take my yoke upon you." "If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink." "I am the good shepherd." "I am the light of the world." "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." And to perpetuate this claim He founded the Christian Church, which has produced in every age and still continues to produce men and women whose holiness of life specifically differentiates them from average mankind, and constitutes them by contrast therewith, veritably new creatures; while their influence, along the ages, has raised the moral standard, and, in a very appreciable degree, improved the moral practice of the world.

It cannot seriously be denied, therefore, that a new force entered into human history with the advent of Jesus Christ, inaugurating a new epoch in the development of man. And this is in harmony with the whole trend—if we may invest Bergson's phrase with a Christian connotation—the whole trend of creative evolution. For minerals emerged upon our planet, as we believe, out of a previously gaseous condition of existence.

Vegetables then rose in variety and complexity of structure and function, above the inanimate level of the mineral world. While the animals again, with their feelings and intelligence and freedom of movement, transcended the lower limit of merely vegetable life.

> Till at the last arose the man ;
> Who throve and branch'd from clime to clime,
> The herald of a higher race,
> And of himself in higher place,
> If so he type this work of time
> Within himself, from more to more.[1]
>
> All tended to mankind.
> And, man produced, all has its end thus far :
> But in completed man begins anew
> A tendency to God. [2]

Now it is obvious that no amount of past experience can ever enable us to predict the character and action of any being which transcends or surpasses the content of that experience. If, for instance, we had only possessed experience of the chemical order, we could never have predicted the nature of the oak, the lily, or the rose. If we had only known by experience the vegetable world, we could never have foreseen that the next order of life would possess intelligence and freedom of

[1] Tennyson, *In Mem.* cxviii. [2] Browning, *Paracelsus.*

movement. If we had only seen the other animals we could never have conjectured that man would arise out of them endowed with a free will.

To the extent therefore that Jesus Christ was a new being in the world, the second Adam, the initiator of a new moment in the creative evolution of mankind, a new order of sanctified men, it will be obvious that we cannot criticise Him by the light of any canons drawn from the ordinary experience of ordinary humanity. We cannot conjecture, for example, what reservoirs of spiritual energy may be open to the prayers of a sinless man who is in perfect communion with his Father. We cannot gauge, from our common acquaintance with the lives and deaths of sinners, what the possibilities may be that are conveyed in the words, "Thou wilt not suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption."

Now the implied denial of this principle is the fatal flaw in the position of Hume and all his followers, when discussing the miracles of Christ.

"A miracle," he says, "is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact,

is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. . . . It is no miracle that a man . . . should die on a sudden; because such a kind of death . . . has been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. . . . Briefly it is contrary to experience that a miracle should be true, but not contrary to experience that testimony should be false."

This is condensed in Matthew Arnold's well-known phrase that "miracles do not happen." Now, of course, if we regard Jesus of Nazareth as a mere man, whose life moved wholly on the plane of our ordinary experience, this argument may be urged with plausibility; though, even then, the phrase "never been observed in any age or country" obviously assumes the point to be proved, and therefore begs the question. But if, with the whole Christian Church, we view the life of Christ as that new thing which we have been describing, and therefore as essentially extraordinary, the argument in question becomes absolutely valueless. For there is a fresh factor in the case, whose modifying influence upon the whole situation no amount of ordinary experience can

possibly enable us to foretell; and a fresh factor, be it remembered, of stupendous magnitude.

The resurrection, which Hume makes his typical example, is precisely an instance of this newness. It doubtless contradicts our ordinary experience; but this is simply because in the Christian view it rises above that experience, and on to a higher plane of existence. It is the beginning of a new order, of a new kind of life. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." Jesus Christ, "who is the first-begotten of the dead," "Christ the firstfruits: afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming." For "He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." This of course is the very meaning of the Christian life, the very point of the Christian hope. We definitely look for an after life in which our personality or self shall be "clothed upon" with a body that will still be material, but of matter so transformed as to be an infinitely more adequate organ of the spirit than at present, and as such called, by St. Paul, "a spiritual body." There is nothing unreasonable in such a belief, for we already know that what we call matter is a far

subtler thing than was once supposed, and full of yet unknown potentialities; while the ascending scale of the arts, as they rise in spirituality of expression, has often been recognized as presenting us with a suggestive analogy. We enter a Gothic cathedral and are awed and uplifted by the silent aspect of its very stones; but our spirit is more intensely, more sensitively moved by the light that flames through the storied glass; and again, in still greater degree, by the articulate anthem of the choir. Yet the light and sound are as strictly material as the pillar or the arch. So may the spiritual be to the earthly body as music is to stone. We confidently anticipate the day, therefore, when the risen body of Christ will be no longer merely believed but actually seen to be, no violation of those laws of nature which are the decrees of God; but only the first instance of the operation of a new law, expressive of God's further decree, which is to raise man above the mortal, as He originally raised him above the animal condition of existence.

But we do not primarily believe this because it is in harmony with our experience of the ascending scale of creative evolution, ever moving in the direction of increased freedom; but because

of our conviction that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a fact which actually occurred. And our reason for this conviction cannot be baldly described in an abstract fashion as human testimony that, as such, is likely to be erroneous. For it is testimony of a kind which is quite unique; testimony with a world-wide context; testimony to an event whose roots reach back into the dawn of history, and whose results are the greatest of all forces in the living world to-day.

And it is from these forces that our belief of course actually starts; that is to say from the present Church everywhere around us, the men who have transmitted the tradition to us, and commended its transmission by their lives. And behind the living Church, and the mighty cause of its momentum, the continuous Church of history rises to our minds,—its seed of martyrs, its missionary zeal, its conquest of the Roman empire, its re-conquest of the fallen empire's foes, its gradual formation of Christendom, its penetration of the modern world; its philosophy, its art, its literature, its myriad practical organizations, its worship, its spiritual experience, its appeal to the human heart, its age-long creation of saints. All

this and much more than this is connoted by the name of the Christian Church.

Now something is wanted to account for all this; some adequate cause for this stupendous effect; some power to originate this Christian Church that was to revolutionize the world. It confessedly starts from Jesus Christ; but He was crucified, and we then read of His disciples that "they all forsook Him and fled." Here surely is no sufficient reason for all that afterwards took place; no foundation, no beginning, no dynamic of any kind at all. Only failure, disillusionment, and the mournful reflection, "We hoped that it was He that should redeem Israel." And then after a few short weeks this picture is totally reversed; these same disciples are preaching with a boldness that moves men's marvel; and the Christian Church is already an accomplished fact. "And there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls." "And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved."

It is obvious that something must have happened, and happened in the briefest interval to change these faint-hearted disciples. They must have gone through some experience great

enough to convince them that the cross meant success and not failure; and so convert their despair into confidence, their cowardice into courage. And we know of course what their own account of that experience was;—the resurrection "whereof we are witnesses." Here then we have an adequate cause, and the only cause that could conceivably be adequate thus completely to reverse the situation.

We approach the consideration of the testimony to this experience, then, with the certain knowledge that the experience in question did, in fact, work a moral miracle which has fundamentally affected the whole subsequent history of the world; in a degree and to an extent with which nothing else that ever "happened in any age or country" is remotely comparable. Its effect, therefore, was unique. But this is only one-half of its historic context. For what was the method of the apostolic teaching? How did they seek to predispose men to the acceptance of their message? By an appeal to prophecy; insisting on the fact that this was the very time to which the whole of their national history had continuously pointed—"the Christ . . . even Jesus, whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restoration of all

things, whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began. Moses indeed said, 'A prophet shall the Lord God raise up unto you from among your brethren. . . .' Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days. Ye are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Servant, sent Him to bless you."

Now no treatment of the Old Testament which sober criticism will allow can invalidate the fact of this great prophetic expectation. The date and details of its first appearance may be modified, though by arguments which will gain very different degrees of credence from different minds. But, in any case, the fact of the expectant attitude remains, and grows increasingly articulate with the succession of the prophets, and through the post-prophetic age. And we have abundant evidence throughout the New Testament of the force with which this fact appealed to the primitive Church. Now this expectation, again, has no parallel "in any age or country." The experience,

therefore, whose effect upon subsequent history was unique, had an equally unique anticipation in antecedent history.

And then when we come to the experience itself, the experience of the fact of the resurrection as recorded in the gospels, it is equally unique; and its very claim is so to be,—to be an event such as never did happen "in any other age or country." For what we find described is not the mere reanimation of a dead body that can be seen by all, by Caiaphas and Pilate, as well as Peter and John; but the elevation of the old body to a new plane of existence; its total transformation; its endowment with other qualities than those of earth; its perfect adequacy to manifest the informing spirit of its possessor. He appears and disappears and is recognized only at His will, and only by those in whom the seed of His own new life was already alive, quickening them with the insight of love.

It is with all these things in mind that we approach the testimony to the resurrection. That testimony of course begins, in the order of dated documents, with St. Paul, who stakes everything upon the fact. "If Christ hath not been raised then is our preaching vain . . . yea, and we are

found false witnesses of God . . . your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." "But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep." He then enumerates a series of witnesses with the confident assertion that the majority of them were still alive; and he describes the spiritual body in words suggestive of nothing at all in past experience, except the appearances recorded in the gospels. While to allow any critics to maintain that he "knows nothing of the empty tomb" seems hardly possible in face of his saying, in close juxtaposition, "that He was buried, and that He was raised the third day." Moreover, the character of St. Paul's language on the subject must be taken into account. It is profoundly emotional, a mighty outburst, a paean of triumph; bearing witness at once to the spiritual intensity of his conviction, and to its consequent irradiation of his whole life with hope and joy. "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. . . ." We feel, as we read, what he meant by the power of His resurrection. It possessed its witnesses, it carried them away, it inspired them to work wonders, it radiated living palpable contagious energy upon the world.

With all this again in mind we turn to the gospel records and the vivid pictures that they present. Much is often made of their apparent inconsistencies and the difficulty of harmonizing the different accounts. But the accounts themselves, it must be remembered, are mere fragments of whose whole context and connexion we know nothing. They describe an event whose stupendous shock must have riveted the attention of its witnesses upon itself, and not upon any accidental concomitants of its occurrence. The records, as we now possess them, were compiled at least a generation after the things that they narrate had taken place. And, above all, they were written within the circle of the Church; that is to say, they were never intended to satisfy the critical curiosity of unbelievers, but to tell believers, how the great fact, in whose experienced power they had long been living, first dawned upon the astonished disciples. They constitute what has well been called "not a history but a gospel,"[1] "The Lord is risen indeed."

Criticism, moreover, of the kind in question is somewhat abstract and academic. One may criticize the technical details of a work of art, a

[1] Dr. Westcott.

statue, or a picture, or a symphony, till one is lost to its spiritual meaning as a whole. And still more is this likely to be the case when the object of our critical preoccupation is a concrete episode in human life. So here, under similar influence, we may easily be led to underestimate the total effect which our records produce,—the vivid, absorbing, arresting character of their picture, together with the absolute unity of impression which the otherwise various accounts convey. There is the changing atmosphere of excitement, incredulity, fear, amazement, joy—the message of the trembling women—the race of the disciples to the tomb—the aspect of the grave-clothes—and then the appearances themselves; unghostly, yet unearthly, human, but majestic, aloof, yet reminiscent of the earlier days. There are the words to Mary in the garden, the meeting of the women by the way, the walk to Emmaus and revelation in the breaking of bread, the appearance in the midst when the doors were shut; the conviction of Thomas, the morning scene by the sea-shore, the threefold appeal to St. Peter's love, the parting benediction and commission to the world. Each of these pictures has an intrinsic impressiveness of its own; each

pulses with reality and life; while they all agree in plainly portraying the same person as of old, with the same minute care for individual souls; and are all equally consistent in their description of His new condition, His supernatural capacities, His complete control over the manifestations of His presence.

It may reasonably be contended, therefore, that the total impression which our recorded picture makes upon the mind, what may perhaps best be called its aesthetic impression, its appeal, that is, as a concrete whole to our judgment of what looks living and sounds true, is such as immeasurably to outweigh the difficulties upon which the negative critics insist. Moreover, the truth of the record, and nothing but its truth, explains that all-important fact, for which the negative criticism is hopelessly unable to account,—the total disappearance of the sacred body from the earthly scene,—that body which had been far too fiercely hated and too passionately loved to be ever an object of indifference to friend or foe; and which, when its production by the latter would have completed their triumph, never was produced.

Now those who reject the Church's view of

the resurrection are of course obliged to form some alternative hypothesis about the facts. And of these the most familiar at present, and indeed the only one worth considering, is the visionary hypothesis: the theory that the Lord's appearances were of the nature of what we call visions, of one kind or another. Visions may be difficult to define, but it is generally admitted that such things occur. The object of the visionary hypothesis, therefore, is to bring the appearances in question into line with a form of human experience which is known to occur, and thus abolish their miraculous character. But this theory owes its acceptability mainly to the fact that such visions are to a great extent subjective; whereas the visions in point, if they triumphantly convinced the disciples of their Lord's continued existence, must have been able to guarantee their own objective reality as fully as did the recorded appearances. And between these two inconsistent points of view the theory oscillates. It is welcomed upon the scene because it is thought to involve no miracle, but it can only do its work by assuming what virtually amounts to a miracle; and here there is a confusion of thought.

Meanwhile this visionary hypothesis accords

with none of the facts that we have been reviewing. It is, on the face of it, quite inconsistent with the actual records of the appearances, which were, in their description, as objectively substantial as ever in the previous life. "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have . . . and He . . . did eat before them." "And they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him." Again it ignores the empty tomb, the significant position of the grave-clothes, and the fact that the sacred body was never produced. Still more does it fail to account for the note of triumph in the apostolic preaching, the sense that the scene on Calvary had been "swallowed up in victory." "Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that slept." "Whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death; because it was not possible that He should be holden of it." "His soul was not left in hell, neither His body did see corruption." While finally it contradicts the immemorial belief of the Christian Church; according to which the resurrection and ascension were the necessary completion of the Incarnation; the final stage of the

taking of the manhood into God; and as such a revelation to us of the ultimate destiny of matter and the material universe, to be the adequate instrument and appropriate home of the sanctified and sinless spirit.

Briefly to resume, then: our belief in the resurrection rests upon converging and cumulative evidence;—the conversion and triumphant conviction of St. Paul; the marvellous moral change in the older disciples; the unique character of the records; with the stupendous illumination which they receive from the antecedent course of Jewish prophecy and the subsequent history and experience of the Christian Church; and behind all this, that philosophy of the universe, that view of God's purpose in the creation and re-creation of man, which the Incarnation first revealed to the world, and of which the Church has continued, through all subsequent ages, to be the witness and the minister.

CHAPTER III

THE SIGNS AND WONDERS

The resurrection is, of all the miracles recorded in the New Testament, the one which receives the greatest emphasis, and is supported by the strongest appeal to evidence; and that not only because of its intrinsic importance, but also because of its complete contradiction of our ordinary experience. Christians, as we have seen, explain this contradiction, on the ground that it is the first instance of a new order of experiences, ultimately destined to become as normal as that which it now transcends, a fresh step upward in God's age-long creation of man in His own image. They believe it, that is to say, not in spite of its being, but precisely because of its being unique. It is part and parcel of the Incarnation, which would be meaningless without it. But if this mental attitude be once adopted regarding the chief miracle in the New Testa-

ment, it will obviously include the possibility, not to say the probability, of all the rest. And this not merely because, if the larger belief be accepted, there can be no logical objection to the lesser; but because the principle which justifies the larger leads us to anticipate the lesser. For if a new force entered human nature with the advent of Jesus Christ we should antecedently expect that it would manifest itself in unfamiliar ways, ways which could not be judged by any criterion drawn merely from our experience of ordinary life. Indeed we should be surprised if it were not so. And it is with this inevitable prepossession that we approach the gospel records.

The first event recorded in the life of Jesus Christ, after His baptism by John, is His temptation; and the account of it can have come only from Himself. For it is no piece of literary composition; it is the record of a profound experience, which as we read it rings convincingly, self-evidently true. Critics may discuss its details, but Christians know that it occurred. Now the first temptation was a particular instance of one that is common to us all—the temptation to use our capacities unduly, for our private advantage.

But why in this case would the use have been undue? Why when the advantage in question would have been harmless to others, and properly helpful to Himself, would the action have been wrong? Simply and solely because the capacity itself was more than human, and its use would consequently have exempted Him from the common human lot. He had come to live His personal life under the limitations of ordinary humanity, and through those limitations to win His victory over sin. The use, therefore, of any extraordinary power to mitigate their pressure would have been a frustration of His purpose, a contradiction of His Father's will; or, in other words, would have been a sin. But the fact that He was tempted to such a course of action proves incontestably that He must have been conscious of possessing this superhuman power. For without such a consciousness there could have been no real temptation; whereas the unmistakable reality of the temptation, in His hour of weakness, shows that the consciousness was there.

Now no stress whatever is laid, in the narrative, upon the possession of this power; no attention is even called to its existence; it is

simply implied in the account of the temptation to its misuse. And it would be beyond measure absurd to suppose that this unconscious implication, occurring as it does, was in the faintest degree artificial or intentionally designed to have any subsequent effect upon our belief in miracles. Precisely for this reason, therefore, because it is so entirely parenthetical and accidental, it must exercise a very strong effect upon that belief. Nor is the question in any way affected by the obviously figurative language in which much of the temptation is described; for the figurative language does not touch or in any way obscure the essence of the temptation, which turned, as it always turns, upon the misuse of freewill. Jesus Christ was tempted to misuse a faculty which, *ex hypothesi*, He must have possessed: and that faculty was miraculous power. But the use of such a faculty, for the relief of others, while it might proclaim Him more than ordinary man, would involve no personal exemption from the ordinary limitations of the human nature which He came to share. And accordingly this is what we find recorded. "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised

up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." Such is Christ's own description of His ministry, given to confirm the faith whether of John or His disciples, and it will be noticed that He here co-ordinates His physical and spiritual works of mercy, His healing and His preaching, as two parts or aspects of one self-same whole; as on another occasion He combines "thy sins be forgiven thee" with "arise and walk." And this is the total impression that we receive from the gospels. Christ came not merely as a teacher or preacher, of one kind or another, but emphatically and pre-eminently as a person. It is Himself, His own character, His own personality, that He presents to the world, and it is to Himself that He invites the world's allegiance. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "And whoso cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me." "For without me ye can do nothing." And to speak of His miracles as evidential credentials is to give them too abstract and external a character. They are rather part and parcel of His whole personality, the inevitable outcome and expression of Himself. "He went

about doing good," and now it is spiritual and now physical good that He does; passing naturally from one to the other, with no appearance of violent transition. If sin is the burden He forgives it, if sickness He removes it, if bodily want He satisfies it, if sorrow He consoles it, even to the calling back again to life of the beloved dead. Moreover, all these "mighty works" are congruous with His grave and gracious personality. There is no display about them, or vulgar appeal to wonder, such as may be found in the apocryphal gospels. He has trampled on the temptation to cast Himself from the pinnacle of the temple. His power is never merely exhibited, but purposefully used; and while ever ready to respond to the cry of the broken-hearted,—"Lord, if Thou wilt Thou canst make me clean,"—He sternly refuses to give any sign to those whose motive in demanding it was captious and unreal. The result of all this is a harmonious picture, moving consistently onward from the temptation, which, if we approach it with a belief in the Incarnation, carries home to us a conviction of its truth. Moreover, it is the only picture of Christ's ministry that we possess. For any attempt, by any method, to eliminate the miraculous element from the gospels simply

destroys them—rends them into disconnected fragments without any coherence or unifying clue; and while this is true of all the gospels, it is doubly so of St. Mark, the simplest and oldest, as we are assured, of all the records that we possess.

But while we think primarily in this way of Christ's miracles, as the spontaneous outcome of His personality, the inevitable consequence and sympathetic manifestation of His love, they were, of course, at the same time, an important contribution to the total effect which that personality produced, and He appealed to them, on occasion, as such. They arrested attention in a way which, under the condition and circumstances of the particular age and people, probably nothing else could have done. They made the person of their worker famous, and therefore predisposed men to listen to His words. "And they were all amazed," we read in the beginning of St. Mark, "insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits, and they do obey Him. And immediately His fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee."

And similarly, in the beginning of St. John, "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him." While after another miracle "many resorted unto Him and said John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true." And St. Peter's first address after Pentecost is to the same effect: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know. . . . This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." Finally Christ Himself gives emphatic sanction to this appeal: "If I do not the works of My Father believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works." "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake."

Further, in estimating this evidential function of the miracles, we must remember their character and kind. They are never, unless with one or two apparent exceptions which would need separate consideration, mere proofs of the possession of power, but also of the moral quality and

purpose of that power—a fact which was singularly overlooked by Matthew Arnold in the notorious gibe, which, for this reason, is absolutely devoid of any controversial worth. Christ came not only to preach a message of mercy, but to found a kingdom of God, a kingdom of righteousness on earth. His life was not merely exemplary or illuminating, but creative. He came not only to proclaim but to win the forgiveness of sins. His deeds were as important as His words; and His miracles have an essential place among those deeds. They are acted parables; they reveal His purpose; they are, as St. John calls them, signs,—manifesting not only His power, but His character, and the object of His mission upon earth. They are an earnest of the future,—fragmentary anticipations of the "healing of the nations"; transitory glimpses of the day when "there shall be no more death"; moments when the sunless light of the new Jerusalem suffuses earth.

We may grant that these wonderful works were, in one sense, relative to their time, and that they would possibly not have fulfilled the same function, if enacted at the present day, in the midst of a sophisticated and critical society.

But this is quite consistent with their possessing an essential value, as permanent factors in the presentation of Christianity to the world. This is a part in fact of that appropriateness in "the fulness of time," which has so often been pointed out by Christian apologists; that particular combination of concurrent circumstances which rendered the epoch in question uniquely favourable for the spread of a world-wide, a catholic religion. So we might say that Christ not only used miracles because they were acceptable to the age and people, and therefore calculated to bespeak, then and there, the attention that He desired; but that He providentially came to an age and people that were ready to accept miracles, for the purpose of emphasizing for ever, in a way that only such works could do, the central significance of His own advent, as the healer of sin-sick souls, the "restorer of paths to dwell in," the re-creator of the world.

The world has many permanent possessions (*κτήματα εἰς ἀεί*) which could only have been produced at particular times and in particular places,—times and places which have not unfrequently been primitive and simple,—but which when once produced have remained significant

for ever. And among such things the miracles of the gospels may be classed. Academic thinkers may imagine a Christianity without them, as more likely to commend itself to the popular philosophy of the hour; but in point of fact they have always been an integral part of its historic presentation. And it is probably impossible to over-estimate the extent to which the constant miracle of the Church, the conversion and restoration of sinful souls has been assisted, through the ages, by the record of those mighty works which led the leper of old to cry out with such heart-felt conviction, "Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean."

> Here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
> Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo, they are!

Christ came, as Christians believe, essentially in order to work what, in the existing state of human society, would be a transcendent miracle by living and dying in perfectly sinless obedience to the will of God; or, to put the case in the reverse way, He came to restore human nature to that harmony with the divine law, which had been broken by the unique miracle of sin. Whichever way we put it, His purpose was to effect a com-

plete reversal of what had come to be the normal state of things. This was the absolutely central and cardinal object of His advent; and it is continually reflected in the details of His teaching. We see a reflection of it for instance in His sharp trans-valuation of all the social judgments of the day; His exaltation of the Publican above the Pharisee; of the sinner that repenteth over the ninety-and-nine just persons who need no repentance; or again in His paradoxical method of teaching.—"Blessed are the poor." "Blessed are they that mourn." "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace but a sword." "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind."

Now the miracles are in harmony with this;

they enforce the same lesson as the teaching; they exhibit the same teacher in action. For they show Him, as He moved about, reversing, for those who faithfully approached Him, what had come to be their normal condition of disease; bending, on occasion, the ordinary laws of nature to extraordinary uses for the merciful relief of human need; even, in rare cases of more than common sympathy, arresting abnormally the doom of death.

In saying this we are of course definitely declining the distinction that is nowadays sometimes drawn between the miracles of healing, and what have been called the cosmic miracles, those, namely, which modify the course of what we call natural law. This distinction is drawn with a view to enabling us to maintain the fidelity or rather the substantial fidelity of the gospel records, while eliminating from them any really miraculous element. The supposed miracles, it is granted, are too intimately interwoven with the history to admit of their removal, as a merely fabulous after-growth; they must certainly be a part of the total impression which Christ made upon His age. But the great majority of these acts were works of healing, many of which, it is urged, may have

been due to the magnetic influence of an exceptional personality, operating in ways that are now coming to be recognized by medical science, as natural although abnormal; things which do not happen every day, but are undoubtedly within the compass of human capacity. And round a nucleus of these wonderful cures, and the reputation which they created, it is easy to suggest that other wonders, less scientifically justifiable, may have gradually gathered in a credulous and uncritical age. On this hypothesis Christ confessedly wrought cures which were beyond the medical ability of His time, and which constituted Him, therefore, a wonder-worker in contemporary eyes. And of course it is a very plausible suggestion, that when once this character was noised abroad, there would be a natural tendency among His disciples to regard many other of His actions as miraculous, which were not really so, and to do this in perfect good faith.

Now on this whole hypothesis we may remark that it involves, after all, the rejection of all those more striking works of healing which are obviously beyond the scope of anything in the nature of personal influence. And indeed, though it may sound plausible, it cannot really be

reconciled with our records; in which cures of the most diverse description are so inextricably interwoven, and so similarly recounted that the isolation of any one class becomes a practical impossibility. Indeed the more startling and exceptional instances of healing are quite as remarkable as anything else in the history; and these are just such things as could not, from the nature of the case, have arisen from any process of misconception, or after-growth of fable. They must either have occurred or not; and the evidence says that they were seen to occur and become potent factors in spreading the fame of Christ. "Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind." Nothing but the most arbitrary and unwarranted kind of criticism can separate these cases from those which may be thought more scientifically probable. And what, after all, is scientific probability? We have seen too many discoveries, of momentous meaning, in the last half-century, to dream of attributing any finality to science. And we may possibly, one day, come to recognize, that the capacity which was adequate to heal disease of such magnitude, would be equally adequate to multiply food or turn water into wine.

In fact the distinction in question is only another instance of that tendency towards the academic and abstract separation of spirit from matter which led men a generation ago to maintain that prayer could only be concerned with spiritual and not with material things, and which nowadays leads others to speak of a spiritual rather than a bodily resurrection. But it has again and again been pointed out that such a position is neither scientific nor philosophical; not scientific, for science only knows spirit in connexion with a material embodiment; nor philosophical, for, philosophically speaking, we only know matter through our spiritual consciousness.

Here then we return to our original position. For it is just this intimate relationship between matter and spirit, as we term them, that lies at the very root of our whole philosophy of the Incarnation, and upon which in their turn the Incarnation and Resurrection throw such illuminating light. And the attempt to make a selection of those miracles which seem scientifically credible is really in re-action against this entire position. For it is merely a particular phase of that humanitarian interpretation of the gospels, which, regarding Jesus Christ as a mere man, must of

necessity restrict His actions to those which a mere man could perform. Whereas this is precisely what we have been contending, in accordance with the universal tradition of the Church, that the Incarnation was not. It was not the revelation of what was already implicit in every man, in such sense that every man, with sufficient effort might have become what Christ was. But it was the elevation of human nature to a new level, which every man may ultimately reach; but only through such participation in the life of the Incarnate One as shall enable him to say, with St. Paul, "I live, yet not I, Christ liveth in me." And the wonderful works of the gospels may well be regarded as the signs, the "august anticipations" of the coming of this new kingdom. And as such they are all of a piece; we have no need to select from them what may seem more probable, because our definite contention is that from the lower level of the old order none of them were probable at all, and their occurrence was the inauguration of the new. "For the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me."

There has been an increasing tendency of

recent years to emphasize the completeness of Christ's humanity, and even His connexion, as human, with His particular time and place in history; which is quite independent of, and entirely opposed to the kind of criticism that would regard him as merely human, though probably neither unconnected in its origin, nor uninfluenced in its course, by the searching analysis of the gospel story to which that criticism has given rise. And with this there has been a growing inclination to recognize that if we are to conceive of Jesus Christ as living a perfectly human life, we must suppose that at no period would He either do or say anything more than could be mediated by, or pass through the medium of His human capacity and consciousness. Some indeed have gone beyond this and speculated upon the extent to which He emptied Himself of His divine prerogative in becoming man. But such speculation is, in reality, wholly *ultra vires*. We may accept St. Paul's phrase (ἐκενῶσεν ἑαυτόν) as expressing a great truth, but what that truth precisely is, the nature and extent of this *kenosis*, we have no means whatever of determining, and dogmatism upon the subject is therefore vain. But while declining to wander off into this

speculative region we may still maintain that the very notion of the Incarnation implies that the Incarnate One should act and speak throughout life as man. And this would prevent our regarding His miracles with many of the older apologists, as simply acts of divine omnipotence, in which His humanity had no share; acts in which the divine suspended and superseded all human operations. This tendency to separate the action of the two natures in Christ has shown itself in various thinkers of the past, but the whole trend of modern theology is towards their intimate unification; and accordingly we feel that His perfect manhood must have had its share in His mighty works. In which case one might regard them somewhat under the analogy of answers to prayer; remembering it to be the perfect prayer of One whose perfect life could give Him the insight to perceive, and the consequent energy to execute the creative will of God. "Even now I know that whatsoever Thou shalt ask of God, God will give Thee," were the words of a friend who must have watched with attention the methods of His life and work. And He Himself, before the raising of Lazarus makes express reference to prayer: "Father, I thank Thee that

Thou heardest me. And I knew that Thou hearest me always: but because of the multitude which standeth around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send me," words which again carry us back to an earlier passage in St. John.—"The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father doing: for what things soever He doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner. For the Father loveth the Son and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth: and greater works than these will He shew Him, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son also quickeneth whom He will." And again, "The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth His work."

It may be said, of course, that these and similar expressions elsewhere in St. John refer primarily to the eternal divine sonship; but they refer to Him as incarnate, as having become the son of man; and this reference is further emphasized by the fact that He promises His disciples, who were mere men, the power to do the like works, and that in immediate connexion with prayer. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that

believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

CHAPTER IV

THE VIRGIN-BIRTH

The Resurrection, and the works of wonder, which we have so far considered, are supported by evidence which, if once the reasonableness of miracle be recognized, is unquestionably strong. But the case is different with the virgin-birth, the other great miracle which is especially associated with the Resurrection, by their common inclusion in the creed of the Church, as an essential part of the great Christian tradition. This by its very nature must rest on the slenderest of human evidence; for it was not a thing that Mary would have blazoned upon the house-top to an incredulous world; but rather one of those that "she kept," as we read, and "pondered in her heart"; only to be revealed in after years to few and faithful friends, when the meaning of its mystery had begun to dawn; and from them to pass at an early date into the tradition of the

Church. And this deficiency of evidence is naturally emphasized by those who would impugn the doctrine.

We must remember, therefore, that the virgin-birth is not a subject that can be isolated, and discussed, as it were, in a vacuum. It cannot be settled by a critical cross-examination of the bare records in St. Matthew and St. Luke. On the contrary it is part of a whole history, in which miracles have or have not a place. If they have not, then *cadit quaestio*; there is nothing to discuss. But if, as we have been contending they have, and that a very important place, we must approach the particular question with this pre-supposition. The two accounts of the virgin-birth that we possess in the gospels have been searchingly criticized of recent years; but they do not present much material for adverse criticism to affect, while minute examination has detected details that make in their favour. They would seem to have come respectively from Joseph and from Mary, and tell their tale in a plain, straightforward way. They would pass, if miracles were not involved in them, for the best and simplest of historic records; and their existence shows at how early a date their content must

have been incorporated in the tradition of the Church.

These accounts, then, form the historical foundation of the doctrine; but when we come to its theological defence, it is not to them so much as to St. John that we naturally turn;—"In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God . . . and the Word was made flesh." The birth of Jesus Christ was, in the conviction of the Church, the introduction into human nature of One whose personality was pre-existent and divine. If this be true, and the other miracles that we have been considering be facts, it would seem antecedently probable that the entrance of so abnormal a personality into the world should differ in mode from the generation of a mere man who did not previously exist. We are, of course, too profoundly ignorant of the ultimate nature of life, and all the secrets of its transmission, as well as of what the appropriate conditions of an Incarnation may be, to speak with any confidence at all of what is or is not probable in such a case. But when we find the story of the virgin-birth already in possession of the field, and realize how early it must have been accepted with conviction by the mind of the

Church; we cannot but recognize its harmony with what we may at least conjecture to be the probability of so unique a situation. It is a congruous part of a coherent whole.

But there are many in the present day who without being prepared dogmatically to deny the doctrine in point would prefer to leave it an open question as being of minor importance; since our view of mere facts of history, it is contended, cannot affect our present spiritual condition. Against this it must be said that our present spiritual condition as Christians depends upon our personal relation to Christ; and this must be essentially affected by our conception of who and what Christ is. We believe Him to be God Incarnate, and His Incarnation to be the advent upon earth of a pre-existent person; and this would seem, as we have, said more compatible, if we are to think about the subject at all, with a virgin-birth, than with ordinary human parentage. For in a sense the words "born of the Virgin Mary" may be called the negative aspect of a truth whose positive side is described in the words "conceived by the Holy Ghost"—"the Holy Ghost the Lord and Giver of life"; since here, in fact was a new creation, or, as we said

before, a new stage in the creation of man. St. John speaks of those to whom He "gave power to become the sons of God" as "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." And what His followers were to become, solely through the means of their union with Him, Jesus Christ was, in the belief of Christians, originally and from the beginning. Hence His continual use of the phrase 'I came' which is marked in the synoptic as well as the fourth gospel. "To this end came I forth." "I came . . . to call sinners." "I came not to send peace on earth but a sword." "I came out from the Father and am come into the world." "I know whence I came." "I am not alone but I and the Father which sent me." "I came forth and am come from God." "To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." While the correlative expression 'sent' is used by the apostolic writers. "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman." "God sent His only begotten Son into the world." "God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins"; recalling His own frequent use of the words "Him that sent me." And the same thought underlies St. Paul's

antithesis: "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit . . . the first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven."

It is this coming of the Lord from heaven that is symbolically expressed for us by the phrase "conceived of the Holy Ghost." But it is sometimes contended in the present day that this might be compatible with a birth from ordinary human parentage, as with those whom St. John, as quoted above, declares to have been "born of God."

Now we are of course too ignorant about the whole subject to deny, *a priori*, the possibility of such a thing as this. Creationism, or the theory that each separate soul, is a special creation of God, infused into the parentally generated body, has from the days of Augustine downwards been the dominant opinion in the Church. And this might seem to leave room for the contention in question, supposing that there were otherwise valid grounds for its maintenance. But on the other hand, traducianism, the view as old as Tertullian, that soul and body are alike transmitted from parent to child, would seem to be more in harmony with our modern evolutionary

modes of thought. And this would make human parentage much more difficult to reconcile with the conception of an Incarnation; though in so speaking we cannot but feel that we deal, in our ignorance, rather with words than realities. But this question of abstract possibility, after all, is not really to the point. For the plain fact is that the doctrine of the Incarnation has come down to us through the tradition of the Church, and inseparably connected with the same tradition, the doctrine of the Spiritual conception and the virgin-birth. The two doctrines have come down to us together, transmitted alike by the Church, and supported alike by the New Testament, and as far therefore as their credentials go, are in similar case: on the same grounds on which we believe the Incarnation to have happened we believe it to have happened in a particular way. And we naturally conclude therefore that this way was a necessity of the case.

But if we are, as before said, too ignorant to demonstrate this necessity on any *a priori* grounds; much more are we too ignorant to deny it *a priori*, and say of the statement which is solidly in possession of the field that it cannot be true.

The conception by the Holy Ghost, then, and its concomitant issue in the birth of the virgin Mary, is not to be regarded as an isolated fact in the past; after which human history reverted, so to say, to its ordinary course. It is the inauguration of that new order of human life, the rise of that new species of man, to which we have alluded above; and whose nature and significance was finally manifested in the resurrection. As such, therefore, it is vitally connected with our religious life, as Christians, at the present day. "To as many as received Him to them gave He power to become sons of God . . . which were born . . . of God." "He is the head of the body, the church." "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; so we being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."

Now the objection, the implicit mental objection, to the doctrine of the Spiritual conception and the virgin-birth, is really an objection to this whole way of regarding the Incarnation, as

conflicting with our conception of evolution. But it must be remembered that what we have of late years come to call scientifically evolution, does not for that reason cease to be theologically creation. Evolution is the scientific name for the process of the world's formation, viewed from the material side, which is the only side with which science is concerned. It is the name of the picture, which we should have seen, if we could have followed its age-long course with human eyes; though it is still a much-disputed question among men of science what the details of that picture would have been. But in any case the picture did not paint itself; evolution is not self-explanatory; it not only leaves room for, but it absolutely necessitates something other than itself to account for the fact of its occurrence; and that other is what theologians call God.

We conceive of God as the absolute, transcendent being, on whom all relative and finite existence depends; but also as immanent, or indwelling in the works of His creation, and therefore sustaining them in life. The picture of creation is one, as we have seen, of successive orders of being, rising in complexity and versatility from mineral to man; and composed of

individual members which exhibit increasing variation as they advance in the scale of existence, tier above tier. And time was, as we know, not so long ago, when in the interest of materialism the desperate attempt was made to attribute both the distinction of orders, and the variation of individuals to chance—infinite chance at play throughout infinite time.

Such an extravagant hypothesis would not disturb the philosophic mind that is well aware of the many other objections to materialism; while the very necessity for its assumption is part of the case against that creed. But in the interest of those who are more influenced by the name of science than that of philosophy, it may be well to recall the fact that the growing tendency of scientific thought, at the present day, is to reject such a merely mechanical view of the universe as inadequate to explain its facts. Even Lucretius, it is now remembered, endowed his atoms with power to swerve—the element of 'spontaneity' of which Leibniz spoke.

But to a Theist, of course, all these distinctions, by whatever means they may be immediately produced, are ultimately the result of God's indwelling presence, who is 'the Lord and giver

of life.' And it has been suggestively pointed out by a recent writer[1] upon the subject that from this point of view the Spiritual conception and the virgin-birth may be regarded as analogous to what takes place at every rise in the scale of being; since at each such rise the old material, mineral, or vegetable, or animal, is endowed with a new potency which it did not previously possess, by causes which, however named, are ultimately due to the energizing presence of the immanent life of God. Thus the virgin-birth would be the supreme instance of this law of all creation.

And this thought may indicate the true line of answer to the familiar criticism of our doctrine which is often made by the student of comparative mythology. "Stories of supernatural birth," it is urged, "may be said to have a currency as wide as the world. Heroes of extraordinary achievement or extraordinary qualities were necessarily of extraordinary birth. The wonder or the veneration they inspired seemed to demand that their entrance upon life . . . should correspond with the impression left by their total career."[2] And the inference is easy, that, as the mass of these stories is obviously fabulous, our own must

[1] Lanier, *Kinship of God and Man.*

[2] Hartland, *Perseus.*

be in similar case. Now in the first place we must recall our answer to Hume's criticism of the resurrection, to the effect that we were not dealing with an ordinary man, but with one whom the consentient view of antecedent prophecy and subsequent history conclusively demonstrate to be, without qualification, unique. And the same consideration may be applied to the virgin-birth. The many grotesque and fabulous stories of the kind may predispose our imagination to reject it; but they constitute no logical presumption against its occurrence in the case of the supremely unique personality of all history.

Moreover, and this is our second and main point, they are capable of the very opposite interpretation. For to what do such stories witness? Extraordinary heroes, we are told, 'seemed to demand' an extraordinary birth. Is not this an instinctive recognition, clothed in mythological form, of the fact that all exceptional individuality is a divine gift, for which ordinary causes do not account—and as such a birth from above? Is it anything less than a dimly prophetic feeling after that which, in the supreme instance, was actually to occur? Such a suggestion would of course have no meaning for a

materialist; but scientific materialism is, as we have just said, less prevalent now than a generation ago, and that not merely as a result of philosophical criticism, but also of scientific progress, which has increased the tendency to recognize some kind of teleology. But it is often the case in the history of thought, that when a dominant philosophy declines, many of the opinions formed under its influence illegitimately remain. And one of these, in the present case, was the opinion that the results of evolution cannot, so to put it, rise in value above the level of their origin; and must for ultimate explanation therefore be reduced to their lowest terms; thought, for example, remaining the last sublimation of phosphorus. And on this view religion was wont to be explained away as nothing but the more or less refined survival of savage speculations, or customs, or dreams. But if once its materialistic basis be abandoned, such an hypothesis retains no shred of justification. Once introduce teleology into the interpretation of evolution, as of course all Theists habitually do, and our whole picture is reversed; we return to the canon which Aristotle enunciated long ago, that the true nature of a thing can only be known

when the process of its development is complete; it must be judged not by the level of its origin, but by the value of its end.

And this line of thought may reasonably be applied to the case before us. Much attention is now being called by psychologists to the important part played by feeling and instinct in the formation of opinion, especially among masses or races of men. And, of course, on the materialistic hypothesis, opinions so formed would have no claim to a rational justification. But a Theist will take a very different view of the fact; since he regards the whole of man's complex nature as a divine creation, however slowly evolved, under the providential guidance of Him, with whom a thousand years are but as one day; and further, a creation with a final cause, a purpose, a destiny. Feeling and instincts therefore will by him be regarded, as divinely implanted, like those of the animals, to act in advance of reason, and reach conclusions which the latter, from the extreme limitation of its experience, is as yet incompetent to gain; a point on which we shall subsequently have occasion to enlarge, in another connexion. But, if so, the universal tendency to ascribe an extraordinary origin to

extraordinary men, however mistaken in the details of its application, may be in principle profoundly true; being due to a dim sense of the fact that all individuality is divinely created, and manifests its creator with increasing clearness, as it rises in degree from the ordinary man, reflecting God in his powers of reason, will, and love, to a fuller reflection in the mind of the genius, the will of the hero, the heart of the saint. We should then regard the mythological accounts, whether of Incarnation or of virgin-birth, as something more than fancies due to primitive ignorance of natural causation—ignorance of a degree which may be somewhat too complacently assumed—and as really the result of a dim insight into the operation of a principle that underlies all human life; and which was actually destined, in the fulness of time, to realize those vague anticipations of what Tertullian so truly called 'the naturally Christian soul' (*anima naturaliter Christiana*). This may seem an over-subtlety of interpretation; but it is only so on account of the persistent pre-supposition in ordinary thought that evolution works only from below; with the false philosophy which we have seen that such an opinion must imply. We eliminate God from

human history and are led in consequence to depreciate the mind of man. But if God works in history He must work everywhere and always, and not only occasionally, here and there; and the kind of insight which in the Jewish prophets we recognize as inspiration may well have had its lower analogue among less spiritual races, whose power of utterance could not rise above mythologic or poetic forms. Our prosaic Western minds are apt to concentrate their attention upon the literal untruth of mythologic stories; and to forget how often they have another aspect, as symbols of spiritual truth; truth which may never shine elsewhere so clearly as through the early chapters of Genesis, but still is to be recognized in many less inspired varieties of myth.

To return then: it is entirely in the high light of the Incarnation that the question of the virgin-birth must be discussed. Here was a new stage in the progress of creation to be realized; a new departure to be inaugurated; a new order of being to be evolved. Now for the first time was to be made manifest the full meaning of the words "Let us make man in our own image." Now was the central event of human history to occur. And when we look back upon the situa-

tion, with these great afterthoughts in mind, we cannot but feel it natural that at such a moment man's prophetic instinct should be justified by a fresh exhibition of the creative power of the Lord and giver of life. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

And if this be the true way of regarding the virgin-birth, we are further provided with an answer to the criticism which would attribute the belief in it to the ascetic tendencies of the early Church, with their over-exaltation of celibacy, and inclination towards a quasi-manichaean depreciation of matter and the flesh. These tendencies, it must be admitted, did undoubtedly colour much that was said and written on the subject of the virgin-birth, as being necessary to break the sinful entail of the race. But their mistake was in laying an undue emphasis upon the flesh; which provoked the natural rejoinder that after all the flesh of Mary was still affected by the common racial taint; a difficulty which drove some later theologians to their doctrine of the immaculate conception. But if we remember

that the source of sin is not the flesh but the will, and restate the case accordingly, there may be perfect truth in the contention that, for all that we know, a sinless being could not owe his human generation to the will of man. And this accords with the gospel history, which presents us with an event, that is wholly due to the operation of the divine will; since the only human will concerned, that of Mary, is by her acceptance —"Be it unto me according to Thy word"— identified, for the time being, with the divine; and the sole agency remains with the Lord and giver of life.

CHAPTER V

THE MIRACLE OF PRAYER

The connexion of miracle with prayer to which we have alluded above invites some further consideration. For it may perhaps be the case not merely that some miracles are answers to prayer, but that many answers to prayer are of the nature of what we properly mean by miracles; and consequently that the latter may best be discussed under the more ultimate and fundamental conception of prayer.

Now there is an initial difficulty in any intellectual discussion of prayer,—in arguing, that is to say, from the evidence of it, which arises from the fact that we never have the mass of that evidence before us. A man of science can publish the facts upon which his inductions are based in a manner for all to see. He can count and weigh and classify them and explain the proportion which they bear to the total

amount of fact in the same field. But with prayer this is not possible, for it is an esoteric thing, the private property of those who pray. Moreover, even those who pray have no collective experience whose mass and volume may be estimated in a statistical form. On the contrary, each man's experience of prayer is confined to himself alone, and cannot be repeated to another, without losing in the process much of what constitutes its personal cogency. While, further, those who pray most, those who most essentially live by prayer, are the last persons in the world to speak of their experience in public. The life of prayer is by its very nature a hidden life. On the other hand, the critics of prayer who are ready to discuss it in argument, and challenge its upholders to their intellectual defence are, *ex hypothesi*, one may almost say, persons who do not pray, and have not therefore the experience requisite for a full understanding of the subject. Hence there is always the double difficulty in attempting any controversial examination of prayer, that those who know most about it are the least willing or accustomed to discuss it, while those who are readiest to discuss it have the least experience of what it is. The two

parties therefore never really meet. The man of the world, like Horace, regards "recourse to miserable prayer" (*miseras decurrere ad preces*) as the last refuge of the destitute. And even Bacon quotes with approval the shallow but plausible cynicism of the man who, when shown the votive offerings in a temple of those who prayed in time of shipwreck and were saved, asked, "Where are the offerings of those who prayed and yet perished?" But for all this the life of prayer goes on, and is a potent force that must be recognized by all who would read human history aright. And though we cannot submit this life of prayer to scientific observation or experiment, we can place ourselves in imagination behind the scenes of it and by so doing acquire a notion of its energy, its momentum, its influence on human affairs. Prayer is of course a world-wide fact; but we will confine ourselves to Christian prayer, as coming nearest to us, and being most open to our sight. Christ touched none of the speculative difficulties that are raised against prayer; He did not justify or reason about it. He simply took its practice for granted; but enforced that practice with the most solemn and authoritative sanction that it has ever received.

"Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do. . . ." "If ye shall ask me anything in my name, that will I do." "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If ye shall ask anything of the Father, He will give it you in my name. . . . Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled."

Prayer, thus regarded, can be no occasional incident, or adjunct to life, no mere assistance in difficult places. It is the foundation of the whole superstructure, the secret spring of the whole energy, the power in which the Christian places all his confidence, as others trust their money or their muscle or their intellect to help them through the battle of life. Christ, then, intended His followers to live by prayer; to live, that is to say, by the Spirit and those spiritual gifts which should come, and which could only come, in answer to prayer. And such we have abundant reason to believe has been the life of all real Christians in all ages, swelling to "a great multitude that no man can number" and carrying on the continuity of the Church. For the most part indeed this has been a hidden life, hidden from the world and therefore from history; we

can neither fathom its intensity nor measure its extent. But the fact that we cannot produce it in evidence must not lead us to forget that it has existed, and continues to exist,—this volume of unknown prayers of innumerable men—and that it has exercised and continues to exercise its influence on the course of human affairs. So much may be said without fear of contradiction, because even those who regard prayer as a delusion are obliged to admit that it deludes men to very practical effect; and that if its influence is only subjective, it leads to very objective results. Now and again there emerge from the obscure background of unknown Christians those eminent characters whom we recognize as saints, and in whom we are able to watch the life of prayer at work; and we see at once how profoundly influential has been its reaction on the world. St. Paul, St. John, St. Augustine, St. Benedict, St. Gregory, St. Francis, St. Catherine, St. Theresa, and many more that might be named, were what they were, simply and solely in consequence of prayer, and would have been totally different characters without it; and no one can deny the magnitude of the contribution that their lives have made to human

history. To put it briefly, the whole spread and work of the Christian Church in the world has been due, in the belief of its members, to answered prayer; and even those who deny the possibility or the reality of the answer must admit that the whole inspiration of Christianity has been due to the existence of the belief.

Prayer then is a world-wide phenomenon, the outcome, it may be called, of an instinct that is natural, or at least very general, in the human race, and has received its highest emphasis in the Christian Church. By the admission of its adverse critics, who, from the nature of the case, can have no experimental knowledge of it from within, it has a profound psychological effect; while those who practise it in any high degree, and therefore possess such experimental knowledge, are serenely certain that it meets with a divine response, and live by nothing else but the strength of this conviction.

If the latter view be, as all Christians believe, the real truth, what is the rationale of prayer? what view of the universe does it involve? It implies that God is ready to give us gifts for the asking; and such a notion is sometimes criticised as unduly anthropomorphic. But any

Theist must admit that He gives us gifts without the asking—life, health, strength, food, friends, the forces of nature, the beauty of the world. We possess all these things by gift, and could possess them in no other way. "What hast thou," St. Paul asks, "that thou didst not receive?" For "every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from above, from the Father of lights," says St. James. To create is to give,—to give existence to what did not previously exist,—and every human creator enriches the world with gifts, poems, pictures, statues, temples, palaces, machines. And so the whole creation is a gift not only in its origin, but in every stage of its subsequent evolution. We only forget this because we are so occupied with our own secondary causation, our own active intervention, that is, in the processes of life, as to overlook the primary cause from which they spring. And the warning given to the Jews of old is as applicable as ever to the world to-day. "Beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God . . . and thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth." And so with the inspiration of the human creator.

"See, the Lord hath called by name Bezaleel, the son of Uri . . . and He hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; and to devise cunning works, to work in gold and in silver and in brass, and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of cunning workmanship. And He hath put in his heart that he may teach, both he and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, . . . and every wise-hearted man, in whom the Lord hath put wisdom and understanding, to know how to work."

And this same law of giving only becomes more consciously explicit as we pass up from the realm of nature to the realm of grace, that familiar word that has grown so technical as to have lost its meaning for most minds, but which simply signifies "free gift." For the religion of the Incarnation is from beginning to end essentially a gift. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," says St. John. "And how shall He not," asks St. Paul, "with Him also freely give us all things?" And so the Church is continued by the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the various manifestations of that "same Spirit" are

"spiritual gifts." "Faith is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." "Every man hath his proper gifts of God, one after this manner and another after that." We are not to "neglect the gift that is in" us, and are to "covet earnestly the best gifts." While finally "the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Now gifts are meant to be used; we are to "stir up the gift that is in" us; and supreme among our natural gifts is that of freewill or power of choice; with the consequent obligation to use it. And in prayer we use our freewill to choose God and goodness or God's will, in preference to all that is its opposite. "My soul is athirst for God, yea even for the living God." "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven." That is the basal motive of all true prayer. It is at once an act of faith in the personality and in the love of God. For it recognizes creation as the conscious gift of a person to persons, and sees in it the earnest of His will to give us more if we desire it. All that lies below the level of freewill He gives us without our asking. But freewill once given becomes the inevitably necessary condition of all further gifts. We must ask before it can be given

unto us ; seek before we find ; knock before it can be opened unto us. There are those who would represent it as humbler to use what we have than to ask for more, and quote to that effect the proverb that to labour is to pray (*laborare est orare*). But that more which we ask for is the sole condition of our using rightly what we have. It is in fact making the noblest and highest use of what we already have, that is to say of our freewill. It is using our freewill to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness ; putting it to that very use which alone justifies and explains its original creation. "Our wills are ours to make them Thine." The final cause of freewill is God. Hence the fallacy of the contrast that is so often ignorantly drawn between work and prayer ; as if the latter were a kind of weak alternative for the former, an attempt to win by petition what we should rather effect by our personal exertion. Whereas, in fact, prayer is a work, and a very difficult kind of work, as those who seriously practise it well know. To begin with : prayer involves the laborious education of our character, by repentance and self-discipline and continuous effort "to live more nearly as we pray," since it is obviously only in the atmosphere of moral and

spiritual development that prayer can breathe. Christ's promise is conditional on our praying in His name; and this connotes the Christ-like life, "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," since it is only "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man" that, we are told, "availeth much." And what a labour, what a struggle, what a continuous warfare this involves, he knew well who said, "Greater is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." And again during the long years perhaps, while this disposition is being gradually acquired, there may be times when prayer is easy, but there will be other times when it is extremely difficult. We have our changes of mood, and fluctuations of feeling; our wills grow weary; times of darkness come, and with them often a degree of moral or spiritual lapse. And if we are to persevere successfully through all these discouragements, we have need to form a regular habit of prayer with its stated opportunities and places and times, a habit that shall force us to pray, in face of all disinclination, when the appropriate occasion recurs. And it is needless to enlarge on how great a labour of the will this must involve.

And again prayer itself, the act of praying, is a

spiritual and mental and, one may add, even physical effort; and an effort which, if we are to judge from the well-known autobiographies of the heroes and heroines of prayer, only increases in intensity as its range extends.

Thus then, judged by the expenditure of energy that it involves, prayer is work of the most serious kind. Moreover, it is strictly analogous to all other work, in which we use our different powers of body or of mind to produce results that are of value in various degrees. For it is the use of our highest faculty, our freewill, to produce the most valuable of results by gaining those gifts from God, which are, as we have seen, dependent for their bestowal upon the freedom of the choice with which we desire to receive them, and could not otherwise be given us at all.

Prayer, then, is no negligible quantity, no erratic eccentricity in the world. On the contrary, it is in actual fact one of the recognizable forms of energy, by which human life is habitually carried on; while in the belief of those who seriously pray, it is the highest and most strenuous of all those energies. Now prayer is very far, of course, from being only or always petition; but it includes a large element of petition. And when we reflect

upon the length of history and the width of the world we realize that the volume of such petition is vast, beyond capability of computation. Moreover, it is the conviction of those who pray, no rare enthusiasts, but an innumerable multitude of sane and sensible men and women, simple and sage alike, that their petitions are answered in various ways, among which are frequently included the control and guidance of outward and material events.

And what does this mean, if it be true, but that the divine will is consciously controlling the course of affairs, and modifying the incidence of natural law. We are all familiar with the fact that the human will is daily and hourly controlling the laws of nature, by directing their application. The condition of our being able to do so is, as we have seen above, that those laws are relatively stable and uniform, and consequently to be relied upon. We can safely trust that the particular properties and reactions of the various materials with which we have to deal, in nature, will be the same to-morrow that they are to-day; and we can make our calculations accordingly. But these same materials, for that very reason, would never issue in new results, without the

active intervention of the human mind and will, enriching the world with mechanical inventions, and beautifying it with creations of art.

And those who pray believe that God does in answer to prayer what we are thus daily conscious of doing in our ordinary life. In which case there is a habitual process at work in the normal course of the world's government that is strictly analogous to the only thing which reasonable people mean by miracle—the guidance, that is, of natural laws, to the production of new effects, by the intervention of God's freewill. The existence of natural laws, so far from being any reasonable argument against the reality of this process, is easily seen to be the necessary condition of its operation. For freewill could not conceivably act in a chaos, where things had neither identity nor stability and cause was not habitually followed by effect. If, therefore, we may safely say, the world was to be governed by freewill, it could only be so through the existence of natural law. And though this is no proof that it is so governed, it is a sufficient answer to any attempted disproof that may be drawn from our observation of such law. And indeed, though the materialism of the last century, which was

the major premiss of this kind of disproof, still lingers in parts of the scientific world, there are many indications that it is giving way to a more spiritual conception of the universe which would no longer be in contradiction with our religious belief.

The point, then, that we have endeavoured to emphasize is that, in Christian belief, God normally administers those of His laws which affect human history in a way that is, though on an infinitely higher plane, analogous to that in which we ourselves direct the operation of natural agencies to the furtherance of our own ends. And our stress is laid upon the normality of the process; that it is one of the many ways in which God habitually "fulfils Himself," a way which is the natural correlative of His gift to man of a freewill. Consequently prayer, so far from arguing an impertinent desire to interfere with the great laws of the universe, is an act of obedience to one of the highest of those laws,—the law which appropriately governs the relation of a free creature to his Creator.

> God's all, man's nought:
> But also, God, whose pleasure brought
> Man into being, stands away
> As it were a handbreadth off, to give
> Room for the newly-made to live,

And look at Him from a place apart,
And use his gifts of brain and heart,
Given, indeed, but to keep for ever.
Who speaks of man, then, must not sever
Man's very elements from man,
Saying, "But all is God's"—whose plan
Was to create man and then leave him
Able, His own word saith, to grieve Him.
But able to glorify Him too,
As a mere machine could never do,
That prayed or praised, all unaware
Of its fitness for aught but praise and prayer,
Made perfect as a thing of course.[1]

The men of prayer, then, habitually live in what would be called an atmosphere of miracle by ordinary men; but to them it is as normal as their social intercourse with their fellow-creatures. For they live in conscious daily reference of everything to God—their wants and works, their failures and sins, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears; while they expect, and in their own conviction abundantly experience, God's equally conscious answer to their need. And this conviction, as we have endeavoured to indicate, is an element in human experience which without exaggeration may be called literally immense.

If then the miracles of Christ were wrought largely through the instrumentality of prayer,

[1] Browning, *Christmas Eve*, v.

they would only be unique or extreme instances of a process which, in the belief of Christians, is for ever going on in the normal course of the world's providential government by God; but not more unique or extreme than we are reasonably led to expect, when we consider what the nature and character of His personality was, and what His "effectual fervent prayers" must in consequence have been.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHILDLIKE MIND

We have had occasion to remark above that the appeal to miracle was especially appropriate to the age and people to which it was made, as we may easily gather from the accounts of the actual effect which it produced. For it is a popular appeal, an appeal to the simple unsophisticated mind that is not ashamed to wonder and to walk by faith. "Hath any of the rulers believed on Him or of the Pharisees? But this multitude which knoweth not the law are accursed," is the Pharisaic question, in sharp contrast with which we read that the "common people heard Him gladly"; recalling His own words, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father; for so it was well-pleasing in Thy sight." And again, "Except ye be converted and

become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven,"—sayings which are echoed with emphasis again and again by St. Paul. "Professing themselves to be wise they became fools." "The world by wisdom knew not God." "God chose the foolish things of the world, that He might put to shame them that are wise."

This naturally leads us to ask what are the characteristics of the childlike mind, or rather attitude of mind; and wherein its superior fitness for the reception of revelation consists.

It is plainly a moral rather than an intellectual condition,—a condition of moral character that guides the intellect aright. It is a commonplace of modern psychology that we only see what arrests our attention, and that for the most part we only attend to what interests us. And so in the same landscape, the same work of art, the same social problem, different people, according to their dominant interests, see different things. And nowhere is this more obvious than in the various views of human nature with which we meet. There is, for instance, the cynical type of mind that suspects every one of interested motives, and is always, in consequence, on its guard against

being deceived. It has undoubtedly facts to go upon, but it exaggerates the proportion of these facts and presents us therefore with a radically false picture of mankind as a whole. Then in sharp contrast with this we have the generous, trustful man who habitually sees good in all others, until it is disproved, and even when disappointed in particular cases, invariably reverts to his natural attitude of trust. And we instinctively feel that, mixed though the world is, the latter has the truer view of it, the view that argues deeper insight, and is moreover far more beneficial; since, while the cynic increases the evil that he is ever ready to suspect, the optimist tends in the long run to create in others the good for which he generously gives them credit. Here then are two observers who attend to and consequently see different facts, solely as a result of the difference in their own moral dispositions. And something of the same kind happens with regard to the religious interpretation of the world. There is a class of mind which realizes the objections to religious belief more vividly than the arguments in its favour; and again another class which, while often equally aware of these objections, yet sees behind and beyond them preponderating

evidence for God and revelation. And though there are many cases in which this distinction appears to be mainly intellectual, it is far more often determined by causes which are in a wide sense of the term, moral. It is notorious, for instance, how many people are indifferent to religion; and this means that they take no interest in it, and therefore pay no attention to it, and therefore are inadequate observers of its evidence. Browning's testing question points to this:

> Like you this Christianity or not?
> It may be false but will you wish it true?
> Has it your vote to be so if it can?

But the opponents of Christ in the Gospels are much more than indifferent; they are actively hostile, and their hostility is expressly ascribed by Him to moral and spiritual causes,—those sins which are the subject of His most terrible denunciation. He had presented to them a combination of character, teaching, action, and consequent claim, which should have appealed, as it did appeal, to unprejudiced, unsophisticated minds, by its intrinsic goodness. But their minds were not unprejudiced, but self-seeking, worldly, sensual, proud; with the result that they could no longer

recognize goodness when they saw it. "A gluttonous man and a wine-bibber." "He casteth out devils by Beelzebub." They present the extreme instance of judgment distorted by moral perversion. "The light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil." It was not therefore because such men as these were wise and understanding in the intellectual sense, but because their intellect, for moral reasons, could not act aright, that they were incapable of receiving the Christian revelation. And conversely, it was not their intellectual inferiority, but their moral superiority that qualified Christ's disciples to believe in Him. Their mental obtuseness, so far from being any help to them, was obviously a hindrance, for which at times they were upbraided by their master; but they preserved the moral attitude which brought them insight in the end. And what were the salient characteristics of that attitude? We may gather this partly from the recorded instances of it, but still more fully from the nature of the teaching to which it was a response. Firstly, then, it was penitent; it was the attitude of sinners who knew themselves for such and felt the misery of their burden and their

need of relief. "Come unto me," had gone out the cry, "all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest," for "I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And in answer we read, "then drew near unto Him the publicans and sinners for to hear Him." He frequently pronounced the forgiveness of sins, and this necessarily implies a degree of penitence on the part of its recipient. While, on the other hand, He blamed those who were unconscious of their sinfulness. "Now ye say we see; therefore your sin remaineth." It was, then, a penitent attitude, and penitence involves humility. Secondly, it was a loving attitude; we see this both in the appeal and the response. "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love." "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love." "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Such was the appeal, and we have many glimpses of the answer with which it met. "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." "Let us also go that we may die

with Him." "Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much." "We love Him because He first loved us." "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus." Thus it was fundamentally an attitude of love, and therefore of the insight which love alone can give. Thirdly, and in consequence of this, it was an attitude of faith or trust. They had seen enough to believe where they could no further see. This again we may infer from Christ's continual teaching on the importance of faith, and desire to increase it in the hearts of His disciples; but we also feel it in their whole relation towards Him—of which two notable utterances of Peter are expressive, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." And again, later, the great confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." In the same spirit St. Paul wrote afterwards, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

Humility and love and trust, then, characterized the early disciples; and these are among the most obvious features of the typically childlike mind; recalling Wordsworth's well-known line:

We live by admiration, hope, and love.

For humility is the quality which best fits us to admire. These men, then, felt their need and were open-minded enough to recognize Christ's obvious ability to meet it; whereas his adversaries felt no need, and were blinded to the face value of the facts before them by their own self-importance and pride of knowledge. Nor is it only in the case of religion that this happens; for, in its intellectual aspect, humility is equally the condition of all true science; being the state of teachableness, readiness to learn, willingness to face new facts without prejudice; the spirit which recognizes that, in Bacon's famous phrase, "nature is only conquered by obedience" (*natura non vincitur nisi obediendo*). Thus humility of one kind or another is the gateway of all knowledge. And it was the humble, in their poverty and need, who received the true impression of Christ's character; seeing in His miracles not merely signs of power, but much more of sympathy and love. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus . . . and His disciples believed on Him." The works were part and parcel of the entire personality which irresistibly drew them to itself. On the other hand, His opponents did all that they could to disparage His miracles, arguing that they were

no proof of goodness, suggesting that He had a devil, and worked by help of their chief, imputing fraudulent collusion, plotting to put Lazarus to death; and yet again demanding of Him something more striking and unmistakable, a veritable "sign from heaven."

Even, therefore, in an age and nation which was prepared to accept miracles, there were these two very different attitudes towards the particular miracles of Christ; and the distinction between them turned upon the difference in the relation of men to Christ Himself. Those who accepted Him saw in His miracles a natural function of His personality, a revelation of the inner meaning of His life and work, who came to loose the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free. While those who rejected Him saw in the same facts only perplexing and inconvenient occurrences which in one way or another must be explained away; with the result that the greatest "sign from heaven," the sign of the resurrection, was never manifested to them at all. And this acceptance and rejection were respectively determined by a difference of moral disposition which was mainly due to the presence or absence of humility, and all that humility connotes.

Now as time went on conditions changed and Christianity swept into its net many, and, in some periods, most of the leading thinkers of the contemporary world. In the age of the Fathers, for instance, and again of the Schoolmen, the preeminence of intellect was to be found within the Church. The wise and understanding were in abundant evidence. But Christian thinkers, as a rule, and in proportion to their greatness, retained the first important element of the childlike mind. For they never forgot that they were dealing with a revelation,—a revelation of forgiveness which they could not have deserved, and of truth which they could not have discovered. And this involved an attitude of intellectual humility,—the recognition by the mind of an object greater than itself, and not to be approached without reverence and awe. Philosophy, said Aristotle, begins in wonder; and Christian philosophy, it may be added, ends there too. For when all has been said that can be said in explanation of the faith to the successive ages, we are brought up at last against the same wonder as St. Paul: "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on

in the world, received up into glory." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? . . . For of Him, and through Him, and unto Him, are all things."

We postulate the rationality, that is, the ultimate intelligibility of the universe; it is of the very nature and essence of reason so to do; and our every fresh step in knowledge increasingly justifies the postulate. But our every fresh step in knowledge also multiplies the distance between what we know and what remains to be known; just as our wider knowledge of the stellar system dwarfs "the solid earth on which we tread" into immeasurable insignificance amid the immensities of space. Meanwhile, the more we realize our intellectual limitation the more impossible does it become for us to live "cribbed, cabin'd, and confin'd" within the bounds of what we strictly know. There is that within which impels us to steer by a compass that points to the unknown,—the ultimate verities,—the whole and the hereafter,—immortality and God. And we turn to faith or instinct to supplement our reason. We see that

instinct leads the lower animals to a correspondence with their environment which is immeasurably surer and greater than anything to which their obviously limited intelligence could attain. For we cannot for a moment suppose, to take a common and universally known example, that the bee or the spider is capable of entering even the threshold of that mathematical world, whose laws, in their constructions, they actually utilize. Thus their instinct acts immensely in advance of their intelligence, and achieves results which the latter could not possibly produce; yet which when produced have all the appearance of being results of intellectual action. The materialistic interpretation of this fact is to the effect that instinct is reason *in embryo*—the germ from which reason is eventually evolved; while a more recent theory, which when thought out would probably prove pantheistic, regards instinct as the living reality, of whose operation reason is a by-product. But neither of these processes can be actually construed into thought; they hover vaguely in the imagination, but neither explain themselves to the intellect nor illuminate the facts. The Theistic alternative, on the other hand, is clearly and definitely intelligible. For the Theist regards

and has always regarded instinct as a product of reason; implanted, that is, by the creative intellect, for a teleological end; and so obviously so indeed as to be one of the proofs of an intelligent Creator. For "He that planted the ear shall He not hear; or He that made the eye shall He not see?" And as our present inquiry presupposes the truth of Theism, we need not pause upon any of the attempts to explain the world in other ways.

Now man also has his instincts, equally, as we believe, implanted for a purpose, and prominent among them, what has been called the religious instinct. We cannot, it is true, for reasons which will presently appear, press the analogy between this and the animal instincts which act unerringly; and it has in fact been called by various other names, as faith, intuition, feeling, sentiment, or different kinds of special sense. But it resembles instinct, in that it is a tendency to think and act in relation to a spiritual environment which is beyond the present reach of our positive knowledge. It leads man to live in advance of what he rationally knows. But at the same time because he is rational, his reason claims by its very nature to play over all the other operations of

his personality; and so it criticises his religious tendency, and either suggests grounds for distrusting it, or accumulates arguments in favour of its truth. The latter result, in the judgment of all Theists of course, is the natural and normal one; and it is instinct thus fortified by reason that may in the fullest sense of the word be called faith,—"the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen." But the same process may and often does lead to a loss of the old simple confidence; somewhat as when we pay conscious attention to bodily functions which should be automatic, or, in the French phrase, "listen to ourselves living," with the result that the operations in question immediately become disordered.

This, then, is one reason why our religious tendency cannot act with the directness of a simple instinct; because being human it is interpenetrated by reason, and must be modified for good or evil by the fact. It must rise to act consciously, or sink "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought" and "lose the name of action." But a second and still more powerful hindrance to the right operation of our religious tendency is sin,—not merely sin in its overt and obvious aspect, the thoughts and words and deeds that

can clearly be recognized for what they are; but much more the inherited and accumulated sinfulness which has so permeated the institutions and customs and opinions of the world, as for the most part to elude observation, while in reality it vitiates the whole moral atmosphere, and disorders the entire history of mankind.

But we need not further enlarge upon this familiar fact, for our only object is to point out that despite these influences, ever at work to obscure its recognition, there does exist in mankind a tendency, which may best be called instinctive, to believe in a spiritual environment to life,—a tendency which human reason does not originate, and cannot demonstratively prove to be correct. True, the operation of this instinct is practically inseparable from some degree of mental interpretation, which may vary through countless degrees from the primitive animism of the savage to the mystic intuition of the saint. But the impulse itself is deeper seated than any of its subsequent interpretations; and in its primary condition, as is well known, among uncultured races, often issues in ritual action before attaining articulate belief.

If, then, this tendency, despite of the difference

necessarily involved in its being human, is still on the whole analogous to animal instinct, it follows that it will in no way be discredited by the fact that it cannot adequately explain itself. For it may simply be acting in advance of the possibilities of the intellect, as we have seen that animal instincts do. It may feel itself, that is to say, in touch with a spiritual environment far greater and grander than can be grasped by our present faculties of mind, but none the less insistently dominating our life. To discount such a thing, then, as mere sentiment, after the fashion of rationalism in the eighteenth century, with the implication that sentiment can be no guide towards objective fact, is wholly beside the mark. On the contrary, the more convinced we are of the ultimate rationality of the world, the more ready shall we be to believe that such a tendency as that in question was implanted in the make and constitution of man, for the purpose which it actually subserves. While in speaking of instincts, in this way, as implanted, we have no intention to deny that they may have been the results of an evolutionary process. That is a scientific question, upon which at present there are differences of opinion, and may be left for

scientific men to discuss. We only mean that, whatever the method of their immediate origination, they are ultimately designed by the creative mind for teleological ends.

Now the childlike mind or attitude of mind may co-exist, as we have said, with any degree of intellectual development; but it is always characterized by the tendency to trust its religious instinct. It may be implicitly and dimly, or acutely and critically aware of all that may be urged in argument against the reasonableness of such a procedure. And yet it clings to the conviction that a deeper reason is on its own side, or, in Pascal's words, that "the heart has its reasons which the reason does not know." And there is abundant justification for this, when we reflect upon the extremely limited nature of human knowledge; a limitation which the rapid advance of modern science is often apt to make us, for the time, forget. But, as a matter of fact, our knowledge is profoundly restricted, not only in degree, but in kind. We are very familiar in the present day with the assumption,—the extremely unwarrantable assumption,—that our scientific knowledge of natural phenomena constitutes the type and standard of all knowledge, the goal towards

which all other knowledge should tend to approximate. Yet, even if this were so, such knowledge is so limited in degree, when compared with all that remains, even in its own field, to be known, as to shrink, at the comparison, to almost infinitesimal proportions. Modern science is still young, and there have been discoveries within the last few years which have profoundly modified important details of scientific opinion. It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that in the immeasurable future, vastly greater discoveries may await us, which will far more extensively revolutionize our whole knowledge of the natural world. But, even so, whatever advances the future may have in store for us can only be advances in degree. Whereas there are whole fields of other knowledge, differing from all this in kind; of which our desire is more importunate, and yet our ignorance more complete. What is the ultimate meaning of the universe? what the nature and character of God? what the origin of evil? what the destiny of man?—all those metaphysical and moral questions, in short, which the scientific mind is wont to leave severely alone,—not because they are not supremely important, but because their solution is utterly and hopelessly

beyond our reach. And yet if the universe is rational, all these problems must be ultimately capable of solution, and simply represent, therefore, vast tracts of conceivable knowledge, which we have not even, as yet, begun to possess. Meanwhile we must live and act, and life and action do in fact involve some kind of conviction about the ultimate mysteries among which we move. It is eminently reasonable, therefore, in a world where instinct plays so important and successful a part, that we should trust our instinctive tendency to believe in, or rather to feel ourselves in contact with, a spiritual environment. This environment, as we reflect upon it, will assume one or another of the various forms which countless complex influences have conspired through the ages to create; it will blossom, that is to say, into some kind of creed; but at the root of them all there is the instinct acting in advance of knowledge which it is most childlike, but also wisest, to trust.

This applies to religion in general, but our present concern is with its bearing upon the Christian revelation in particular. That revelation at its origin, as we have seen, was hidden from the wise and understanding, and accepted by babes. But this is plainly no temporary

accident, but a permanent characteristic of its existence. "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." These words doubtless apply primarily to a moral and spiritual condition; but it is a condition which cannot fail also to affect our intellectual attitude. For the convinced Christian inevitably starts from the religious side; he carries about with him and can never lay aside his sense of sin and weakness and personal need, together with the way in which, as part of his own experience, Jesus Christ has met and daily meets that need,—the Christ of St. Paul and St. John, and of the Christian creed, "the same yesterday and to-day and for ever." He knows from within the life of prayer, with all that we have seen this to involve. Consequently he can never approach the gospels in the detached spirit of an archaeologist, seeking to reconstruct from its recorded fragments an historical character of the past; but only with the view of gaining deeper insight into the present personality upon which his daily life depends. True, he may very likely have imbibed from the modern atmosphere its disinclination for miracles. But on approaching the gospel history he finds them there; and there

in a way that makes their removal impossible without the destruction of the entire record. This arrests his attention and necessitates reflection; in the course of which, being what he is, he can hardly fail to see their remarkable congruity with the whole purpose and character of Christ, as he has come to know it, as well as with much that may have passed in his own experience of prayer.

Moreover the belief in the reality of these miracles was, as Christians must remember, a potent element in the total impression made by Christ upon His first disciples, as is emphatically stated by St. John; indirectly, therefore, a potent factor in the foundation of the Church, and consequently of all that the Church has subsequently done for the world, his own spiritual experience included. He is thus historically and personally linked with the belief in question in a way that must affect his entire estimate of the probabilities of the situation. He has come to believe, under Christian influence, and to guide his life by the belief that Christ came to give us a fuller revelation of God, and the means of practically overcoming the evil of which we have as yet no speculative solution; in other words, that He

came to bring us both knowledge and power from that unknown region which we have seen to be relatively so vast, and to which we have and can have no other intellectual means of access. He is by this creed committed to the conviction that in the government of the universe spiritual interests are ultimately paramount, and material mechanism subordinate; freedom the end, and mechanical necessity the condition, as we have seen, of its realization. He cannot consequently adopt the canon of criticism which is based upon the directly opposite assumption to this, and yet which inevitably underlies the facile epigram that "miracles do not happen." For that assumption is, in the first place, that the material order of things is a closed circle, which admits of no spiritual interference; and, in the second place, that our present fragmentary knowledge of the material order is adequate to justify any such generalization about its total character, or its relation to the realm of freedom and worth. On reflection, indeed, it must be obvious that sincere belief in a revelation precludes any *a priori* criticism of the mode in which it would be likely or unlikely to be made. For such criticism would imply a degree of knowledge superior to that which it is the very

purpose of revelation to convey. To recognize an occurrence as unique and yet prescribe the conditions to which its uniqueness must conform is manifestly, on the very face of it, absurd.

Briefly, then: the sincere Christian, however intelligent he may be, must have that sense of his mental limitations which begets intellectual humility. He believes himself to have received a revelation, through the mediation of the Christian Church, which he accepts because of the profound degree in which it corresponds with and satisfies his needs. That revelation, thus mediated, has led him to live in love and trust of a Person, whom he holds at once to be the historic human founder and the ever-present divine head of the Church. He finds that human founder insistently credited with works of wonder, which are eminently harmonious, on reflection, with His unique character and claims; and the belief in which was certainly conducive to the foundation of the Church; whose apostolic leaders were also credited with similar actions, performed in the name of Christ. He feels, moreover, the inner kinship of these things with much that happens in the life of prayer; that life which has carried on the Christian Church throughout the ages; with re-

sults which, though they cannot be produced in argument, have profoundly affected the believing mind, and its consequent reactions upon outward events. And these accumulated considerations amply justify him in retaining the more childlike, but not therefore the less philosophical conviction that

> . . . miracle was duly wrought
> When, save for it, no faith was possible.
> Whether a change were wrought i' the shows o' the world,
> Whether the change came from our minds which see
> Of shows o' the world so much as and no more
> Than God wills for His purpose.[1]

[1] Browning, "A Death in the Desert."

CHAPTER VII

THE VALUE OF FREEDOM

We have already had occasion to point out that however much the laws of nature may seem, on a superficial view, to oppress our freedom, they are nevertheless the indispensable condition of that freedom's use. We can only play our game at chess, because the several pieces have a constant value; or wing our flight through the air, because the stability of mechanical principles is assured. Oratory is only possible, while words have a fixed meaning; music or painting, while notes or colours retain their identity of tone. We can only dance if the earth beneath our feet is motionless; or sing if the composition of our atmosphere remains unchanged. And it may have some bearing upon our present subject to pursue this thought further. For it suggests that nature's fixity may after all be only a condition and a means of which freedom is invariably the real object and end. And if we

turn to that picture of the universe to which we have already made allusion, it would seem to bear this out. There are successive orders of being, as we saw, marked by more or less fixed characteristics; which enable us to arrange and classify them into kingdoms, genera, species, families, and other groups; and having done so, to make them objects of scientific investigation. But these classes, in their turn, are composed of innumerable individuals, broadly conforming to the common type; yet each with its own "peculiar difference," its own note of separation from all the rest. Now when we consider a group as constituted by the characteristics which its members possess in common, we are considering it merely in an abstract way, as it exists for thought; but not as it actually exists in life, since we are leaving out the individual notes which accompany all concrete being. Whereas what actually exists at any given moment of time is a multitude of individual things and persons; correlated indeed, and interconnected in innumerable ways, but retaining each their own idiosyncrasy, their own peculiarity, their own identity,—the particular birds that are singing, the particular lambs that are at play, the particular roses and lilies that are blooming now;

the particular men that are rejoicing and sorrowing, as they make history to-day. And this is the element of truth in the old nominalistic contention, that the individual alone is the real. For each thing is, in a very real sense, most truly itself, not to the extent that it embodies its generic type, but to the extent that it departs from its type, and so asserts its own newness in the world, its own freedom from conformity to what has gone before. And so the ultimate function of the uniform energies and agencies and laws of life is to issue in the perpetual efflorescence of novelty which each fresh day brings to the birth.

Moreover, the various orders of being rise in an ascending scale, of which the constant characteristic is increasing freedom. The flower has more variety of growth and to that extent more freedom than the crystal; the animal with its power of movement is freer than the flower, bound to its root; while human freewill again infinitely transcends all merely animal activity. Nor again is human freewill static; it contains within itself the principle of its own infinite development and is ever at work to extend and multiply the range of its sway. The earliest records of human activity are the fossil implements that primeval

man has left behind him; and many of these, as is well known, are adorned with decorative design. Here then we have at once the beginnings of science and of art; which have never subsequently ceased to labour for the fuller furtherance of man's freedom; art, by widening the influence of his thought to distant climes and after ages; science, by converting the forces of nature which at first appear as alien powers that oppress him, into obedient instruments and organs of his will. While here again there is a *crescendo* movement in the progress of the ages, always making towards greater freedom. Architecture, the earliest of the great arts, is of the most limited accessibility; we must travel to the Pyramids or Parthenon to see them. But music, the modern art, is free as air, and of world-wide range; Bach and Beethoven come to us. And though the triumphs of modern science may not necessarily argue a greater mental capacity in their authors than do the simpler inventions of earlier ages, the scale on which they have increased the range of human freedom is immeasurably larger.

Thus the picture which the world presents is of a sphere in which freedom is for ever on the surface, and for ever striving onward towards

increasing ascendency; while what we call the reign of law is but the indispensable substructure of this higher reign of freedom; stimulating by its stubbornness our art and science to overcome it, and passing into our obedient service as soon as it has been overcome.

But, after all, freedom in itself is but a negative condition, whose value depends entirely upon the use to which it is put. For freedom to choose the right implies freedom to choose the wrong; freedom to love involves freedom to hate. There must always, therefore, be some end more final than freedom, which gives to freedom its true character. And this end, in the last analysis, must always be the moral law; which is as imperative in its own realm as any other law of nature, though it can only be obeyed by free acts of will. Here is in fact the point where necessity and freedom meet and merge. For freewill can only reach its fullest realization through surrender to the moral law; while that law is only moral, because its every acceptance must be an act of freedom. And in this willing obedience to the moral law the long upward drift of freedom culminates.

Hence the great paradox of sin. Just when

this fundamental principle of the universe rises to its highest level, reaches the point where its real importance is for the first time seen, its ultimate aim made for the first time manifest,—it suddenly fails of operation, vacillates, collapses, falls from its rational goal. For, apart from all its other aspects, sin contradicts the principle of freedom. This may often escape notice from the fact that sin is always a form of self-assertion, though perverse self-assertion; and so looks, on a superficial view, like an act of independence, an extreme instance of freewill. But if we turn from the single act to the habit which it inevitably helps to form we soon see the true state of the case. For the man who obeys the moral law, in so doing, employs his will to perform its proper function; puts its machinery to its true use; acts in harmony with the order of his being, and therefore with the order of nature, which is a concatenated whole. And the more habitual such action becomes to him, or, in other words, the more moral habits he forms, the more obviously free does he become both in the capacity and the range of his life's operation.

For, to begin with, habit diminishes the power of all opposing motives and makes it easier for a

man to will the right, and so put his freewill to its rational use. And then his body, from that observance of the laws of health, which is necessarily involved in a moral life, becomes a more adequate instrument to carry out his will, through nerve, muscle, and brain; while externally he will be in harmony with the laws of society, and instead therefore of being hampered by them, will enjoy and utilize their protection in the development of his life. Finally, as this life, being moral, will inevitably be occupied in one form or another of social service, he will win the goodwill, the esteem, the affection of his fellow-men; and through the co-operation with others, which this makes possible, he will further extend his sphere of usefulness. Thus his freedom progressively widens like a circle in the water.

But the habitual sinner reverses this process at every point. He begins by giving way, as we say, to passion or pleasure, or self-interest or pride,—to some motive which is not due to the self-determination of his will, but which lays violent hands upon his will and carries it captive away. And at every stage of his decline the reality of this captivity increases, till he is literally the slave of one bad habit or another, and has

practically lost his original freedom of will. Further, if his sins affect the body, as they do more than people are aware of, that too becomes disorganized and incapable of service; a fetter, not an implement; a tyrant instead of a slave. And as the character resulting from all this tends to alienate the trust and esteem of others, it will necessarily lose that extension of personal liberty which arises from the power of co-operation with our fellow-men. While finally, as sin increases, it passes into crime; it comes into collision, that is, with the laws of society, which thenceforth become the man's enemies instead of his protectors, with the result that the last shred of his personal freedom is abolished by imprisonment or even death. Thus sin begins by weakening the will itself, and then continues, step by step, to close with increasing insistence the successive avenues of its operation. It is therefore quite plainly and unmistakably the counter-agent of the principle of freedom, and thence has been called, as we said above, the only miracle, in the bad sense of the word, that we know, being a real breach of that moral law of nature which is most self-evidently divine.

If, then, the world, which is rationally ordered

up to the point where freewill appears, is to be continued in its rationality, this malign miracle must be counterworked and the principle of freedom restored to its pre-eminence. Reason demands this *a priori*, and the demand is answered by the life of Christ. "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

The sinlessness of Christ meant complete self-determination, completely free operation of the will; unmoved alike, as we see in his History, by bodily appetite or fear, by spiritual ambition, by the flattery of friends, or the hostility of foes; "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously"; who alone, of human kind, could ask, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" In the same spirit of freedom, He refuses to be bound by false

social conventions, or irrational applications of ceremonial law. He does not bind His disciples to fast before they need, and justifies their eating with unwashen hands; He dines with publicans and sinners; and heals the sick and sanctions the plucking of corn upon the Sabbath; asserting that new wine must be put into new bottles, and that the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. And it is strikingly accordant with all this that Christ's promises to His followers are largely couched in terms of freedom. "Jesus therefore said to those Jews which had believed Him, If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "Verily verily I say unto you, Every one that committeth sin is the bond-servant of sin." "If therefore the Son shall make you free ye shall be free indeed." "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you." This limitless freedom of answer to prayer is continually emphasized, and though the memorable expression of it, which had already become proverbial with St. Paul, is often explained in the present day as hyperbolical, we must remember that it occurs in immediate connexion with the

record of one of the most marked of physical miracles. "In the morning as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto Him, Master, behold the fig-tree which Thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them. Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which He saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." And the Lucan variant suggests that the lesson was inculcated more than once in a similar way. "And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you." "Ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be full."

Again, when we turn to St. Paul we find the same prominence given to the freedom of the Christian life, "our liberty which we have in

Christ Jesus," both in contrast to the bondage of the ceremonial law and to the slavery of sin. "So long as the heir is a child, he differeth nothing from a bond-servant, though he is lord of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed of the father. So we also when we were children were held in bondage under the rudiments of the world: but when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem them which were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So that thou art no longer a bond-servant, but a son." "For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Such is the Christian's freedom from the ceremonial law; but his profounder freedom is from the law of sin. "I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin, which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body

of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ. . . . For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and death." "Being made free from sin ye became servants of righteousness." "With freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast, therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage."

Moreover the powers of enfranchisement thus begun will be continued beyond the grave; for "if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies through his spirit that dwelleth in you." "Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself." And this again is part of a wider movement. "For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God . . . in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."

Thus both Christ's life and teaching, and St.

Paul's interpretation of that life and teaching, put freedom in their forefront—the reversal of the great failure, the removal of the curse, the restoration to man's will of power to keep the moral law, the re-endowment of his whole being with spiritual life. The disorder of sin has been counteracted, and the law of liberty restored to its true place in the ever-ascending scale of creation.

Now the miracles of healing, which form so large a proportion of Christ's wonderful work, are an obviously congruous element in all this. "Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, to have been loosed from this bond?" Such might be the motto of them all. They are acts of liberation, "loosing the heavy burdens and letting the oppressed go free," at once consequent upon, and symbolic of the more radical enfranchisement from sin; "for whether is it easier to say thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say arise and walk?" And as such they are the natural accompaniments of the new promise of freedom. "I am come that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly."

But incidentally these same works were often

utilized by Christ to impress a further message of liberation upon the minds of His disciples—liberation from the oppressive misuse of the Mosaic law, which had been perverted from its beneficent intention into an instrument of bondage. "Laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men . . . making the word of God of none effect through the tradition that ye have delivered." "Ought not this woman . . . be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" The Sabbath, in Jewish eyes, was a divine institution of the profoundest importance; and yet they needed to learn that "the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath," and that therefore the Son of Man was "Lord even of the Sabbath," and could and would supersede its literal observance in a higher spiritual interest.

> Correct the portrait by the living face,
> Man's God, by God's God, in the mind of man.

And so many of the miracles of healing were invested with a secondary significance by being wrought upon the Sabbath day. Nor did this arise from any desire to disparage the institutions of the law. On the contrary, it is expressly

said that "then spake Jesus to the multitude and to His disciples saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: all things therefore whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe." But this only gives additional emphasis to the principle that the most sacred custom may be for the time superseded, the most august institution altered, when a sufficiently pressing human need shall arise.

Now, as this was a principle on which Christ avowedly acted, and to which He called emphatic attention, it would again be congruous with His character and purpose to do the same with regard to what we call physical law—modify its operation, for the time being, in a sufficient spiritual interest. It is of course easy enough to minimize the sufficiency of interest in the recorded cases, if we isolate them from their total context. Why, we may then proceed to ask, should one wedding feast or one hungry multitude be singled out for such stupendous favour? why for one ordinary boatload of fishermen should a storm be miraculously stilled? But this is not really the kind of question at issue, for the whole context of these events must be taken into account. They were never mere

"wonders," we must remember, but always "signs" pointing, that is to say, outside of and beyond themselves. They were opportune occasions, never to recur, for furthering the work which Christ had set Himself to do. They awoke attention to His personality and character, and predisposed men to listen to His claims. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and His disciples believed on Him." "What manner of Man is this that even the wind and sea obey Him?" "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." In other words they were inseparably and essentially connected with the gradual growth of men's first faith in Christ, and so with the acceptance of the Christian religion, and all that it has been and done, and shall ever be and do to human kind. This and nothing less than this is the total context of these few "mighty works"; and if the sacred law of the Sabbath might rightly be suspended for one sick woman to be healed, we may well suppose that physical law might, in like manner and by like authority, be subordinated to the spiritual welfare of the entire human race, with all which that may mean hereafter for the universe at large.

Thus regarded then, these interferences, as we call them, with the laws of nature to which we are accustomed, strikingly cohere and harmonize with the miracles of healing. For they only carry a degree further the emancipation of our race. Both alike are the appropriate actions and manifestations of our great Deliverer, and point to the day when human freedom shall rise to its full capacity and His disciples shall do "greater things than these." Of that day and its significance we may catch a glimpse in what is recorded of the risen body of the Lord. For the behaviour which had previously been exceptional has, after the Resurrection, become normal. He no longer works wonders, but His whole condition has become a wonder when regarded from the lower plane of earth. He passes out from His grave-clothes and in through closed doors, and appears and disappears and controls His own recognition in a way to imply that His risen body is the perfectly obedient and adequate instrument of His will; in which therefore human freedom, and all therewith that had led up to human freedom, culminates. And the like condition St. Paul foresees for all "that are Christ's at His coming."

"If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So also it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.' Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural: then that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is of heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly."

CHAPTER VIII

THE FREEDOM OF GOD

THE whole of the preceding discussion, of course, presupposes that God's own relation to the universe is free; that He creates and sustains and governs it according to His will. To a certain extent indeed this is a tautologous statement. For when we use the term 'God' rather than 'Nature,' or 'the Absolute,' or any other such abstraction, we imply our belief in a personal God, who, as such, therefore, must possess, among His attributes, freedom of will or the power of self-determination. And so to ask "Is God's relation to the universe free?" is practically equivalent to asking "Is there a God?" But this is so far from being always recognized that some consideration of the point may be of use.

Intellectually considered the conception of divine freedom rests on the time-honoured argument from man to God. This is an argument

that has often been attacked with superficial plausibility, but always to be vindicated afresh. It certainly represents what may be called the naturally healthy instinct of the human mind. Browning, for example,—to quote a single instance—uses it frequently and with great effect:

> From the gift looking to the giver
> And from the cistern to the river,
> And from the finite to infinity,
> And from man's dust to God's divinity.
> Take all in a word: the truth in God's breast
> Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed:
> Though He is so bright, and we are so dim,
> We are made in His image to witness Him.

It is the argument, again, made prophetic of the Incarnation in "Saul":

> Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
> That I doubt His own love can compete with it? Here, the parts shift?
> Here, the creature surpass the Creator,—the end, what Began?
> Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
> And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?
> . . . . . .
> Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou—so wilt thou!

And this may remind us that it has the more solemn sanction of our Lord Himself. "If ye

then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him." "Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge His elect?"

Indeed, on reflection, it should be obvious that we can reason in no other way, if we are to reason on the subject at all. For human personality, as we saw in a previous chapter, is the only point at which we get behind the scene of the world and view it from within. Of all the rest of the visible universe we can only see the outside or phenomenon or appearance. We do not know its inner side or reality, and can only describe it in terms borrowed by abstraction from the one and only thing that we know experimentally, namely ourselves. And so we speak of lifeless matter, or vegetable growth, or animal movement, by what is, in the last analysis, an analogy drawn from our own bodies, with successive portions of our total experience left out. We see indeed the various pictures before us, but we can only interpret them through ourselves; and we judge them to be inferior to ourselves, in the sense of lacking the further

qualities which we possess. Analogously, when thinking about God, whom we conceive as a spiritual Being infinitely superior to ourselves, we can only argue from the spiritual faculties which we ourselves possess, our reason, and feelings, and will; except that in this case we proceed, not by abstraction, but by amplification. He must possess, we reason, all of value which we possess, but in infinitely greater degree. We may guard this process of reasoning by careful criticism, but we can employ no other, for we have no other to employ. The only alternative is the agnosticism which, either in religious or secular form, holds God to be unknowable, and declines therefore to think upon the subject at all.

Man then has a will which, however great may be the practical limitation of its range, is essentially free to choose between alternative motives, and so to determine itself. The Being therefore who has called this freewill into existence must, *a fortiori*, himself be free; or, in other words, freedom could never have existed as an effect, in the world, if it had not already existed in its cause. Or we may reach the same conclusion by arguing from the rationality of the world, which is the necessary presupposition of

all science. For to recognize reason that is intelligible to us, and therefore in a measure akin to our own, in the system of the universe, is to recognize final causation or purpose or design. And this implies the power to select, and to realize the results of such selection.

Now human freedom, which is the only freedom of which we can have actual knowledge, is largely limited both by the laws of nature and the opposing wills of alien men. But we can perfectly well, by imaginative abstraction, separate our free act of choice from the countless limitations which may circumscribe its operation. And it is on this free act of choice that we model our conception of the divine freedom. It must resemble us in our free act of choice but not in its limitations; it must be absolute, that is to say, or undetermined by any being outside itself. On the other hand, limitation by voluntary self-determination is a totally different thing; and this we have reason to ascribe to God. Theoretically perhaps one might say that creation, as such, involves some degree of such limitation, inasmuch as it implies the selection for realization of one possibility to the exclusion of all others. But this is a metaphysical subtlety that we need

not pause to consider, for we have a much more obvious instance to the point in the case of human freewill, which is a very real and practical limitation of the divine. For human freewill does actually, as we know only too well, break the laws of God and contradict and counteract His will. "They were disobedient and rebelled against Thee, and cast Thy law behind their back." "They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in His law." "We have rebelled against Him, neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His laws which He set before us." Such is the dark record of the continuous history of man; and whatever may be the ultimate issue of such disobedience, it is certainly, as long as it lasts, a limitation of the divine will; but a limitation which must have been foreseen before finite freewill was created, and permitted perhaps as a profound and necessary object-lesson in the terrible consequences of its misuse

> . . . till the soul hath seen
> By means of the evil that good is the best,
> And through earth and its noise what is heaven's serene,
> And its faith in the same hath stood the test.

Again the Incarnation, for all who believe in

it, exhibits another kind of divine self-limitation—"Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea the death of the cross." We cannot fathom the nature of this humiliation, for we have not and could not have the necessary knowledge; the only point about it that we can understand is its wholly voluntary character. "I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." Nor, for all that we know, need the Incarnation be an isolated event. We cannot tell, but we may well suspect that it exhibits a principle of divine operation, which may extend, *mutatis mutandis*, throughout the whole system of the universe, if it be "His will, according to His good pleasure . . . to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth." For we may notice that it is especially in connexion with the thought of laying down His life for the sheep that Christ

Himself said, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock, one shepherd"—words which certainly may have an application to other worlds than ours.

Now if such divine self-limitation is a fact, it is obvious that it must present the same picture to our observation as any other kind of limitation; because we can only see its result, and not its origin—the necessity of its effect, and not the freedom of its cause. We may believe, for instance, that moral evil only exists by God's permission, but the picture which it presents is the same as it would be if He were unable to prevent it. Hence as long as divine self-limitation lasts, it will always be capable of misrepresentation by minds of as narrow range as those of men—capable, that is to say, of being attributed to determination from without.

Accordingly in the various mythologies which were the precursors of philosophy, the first fanciful attempts to explain the mystery of the world, we continually find traces of one power or another regarded as limiting the gods. The Teutons told of Ragnarok, the twilight of the gods, the time when Odin and all the Asgards

would be ultimately swallowed up. And Aeschylus, among the Greeks, seems to hint at a similar thought through the mouth of Prometheus, the tortured but tameless enemy of Zeus. Then, again, the Greek Pantheon is represented as raised upon the conquest of an earlier and ruder race of gods; echoes of which seem to linger on like a dark background in the conception of a fate or fates inexorably overriding the actions alike of gods and men. While in Persia we find Ahriman, the self-existing spirit of darkness, who counterworks and counteracts the good creation of Ormuzd by a similar evil creation of his own.

And then when mythology gave way to philosophy the same thought reappeared in more critical form. Plato assumes an element of necessity in the universe—necessity, not exactly in the modern sense of the term, but denoting an anomalous, disorderly, erratic, unintelligible force, which has been well described as "identical with the primaeval chaos or cosmogony of Hesiod."[1] And this can only be partially reduced or, as he says, persuaded into regularity and order. Hence the divine ideas of goodness, beauty, truth, justice, and the like can never be adequately realized in

[1] Grote: *Plato.*

the material world of sense : the artificer of the universe, who in his goodness would gladly make all things good, can only succeed so far as the contradictory element of necessity admits. The same thought recurs in Aristotle, who regards 'matter' as the ultimate cause of imperfection in things; meaning by the term 'matter' not matter as we know it in sensible experience, where it is always associated with some degree of form, but the mere matter or potential being which lies behind this, and is as yet formless, and therefore very similar to Plato's 'necessity.' But as none of this imperfection or unrealized potentiality can be associated with the thought of God, He has to be conceived of as living a life of self-contemplation or self-communion entirely apart, and only influencing the world as being the object of its universal desire. Here, therefore, in the very attempt to escape from the conception of limitation, Aristotle reaffirms it by withdrawing God from all capacity for reaction upon the world.

Of the subsequent schools of Greek philosophy, two, the Stoic and Epicurean, were more practical than speculative; and of these the Stoic professed a monism, which really hovered

between materialism and pantheism, treating theology, for instance, as a branch of physics; while the Epicureans were frankly materialistic. But with the Neo-Platonists, the true continuators of Plato and Aristotle, in the field of speculation, their dualism is even further emphasized. Plotinus, with the utmost desire to connect God and the world, is still hampered by the conception that the divine transcendence must involve aloofness: and speaks of the Good or the One as necessarily self-regarding, and though the source of all things actual, yet without directing its energy towards them—a close resemblance to the Aristotelian thought.

Thus Greek philosophy, with all its conviction of there being law and order in the world, never finally got rid of dualism; or in theological language always conceived of some alien limitation or inherent incapacity in God. And it has been often pointed out that this position is as fatal to the hopes of science as to those of religion. For the necessary presupposition of science is that the universe is intelligible and can therefore be understood; that is to say, that all which is at present unknown must admit of being brought into intellectual relation with what is known, and

thus an ultimate unity of knowledge come about. And though such an unity may be ever unattainable, except for the divine mind, it must always represent the goal towards which science moves; whereas any break or gap in the continuity of the relationship between the parts of the universe and its whole, if such a thing were conceivable, would make this unity impossible, and existence, in the last resort, irrational; precisely as a God who was out of relation to men could be no source or object of religion. Greek philosophy, therefore, with all its insight did not attain to an adequate goal.

Now in sharp and clear contrast to this whole movement of thought, with its limitation of the divine, stand the successive utterances of the Jewish prophets. Their method is intuitional, not argumentative; their speech dogmatic, not discursive; their object religious, and not philosophical; but they have a definite view of first principles; to the effect that God is One, self-existent, personal, and that His relation to the universe, which reflects His unity, is one of free creation and constant care.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. . . . God said let there be . . .

and there was." "He spake and it was done: He commanded and it stood fast." "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counsellor hath taught Him? With whom took He counsel and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of judgment, and taught Him knowledge, and showed to Him the way of understanding? . . . All the nations are as nothing before Him; they are counted to Him less than nothing and vanity. It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers." "From the habitation of His dwelling He considereth all them that dwell on the earth. He fashioneth all the hearts of them: and understandeth all their works." "The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of His understanding." "The Lord is the true God; He is the living God, and an everlasting King: . . . he hath made the earth by His power, He hath established the world by His wisdom, and

by His understanding hath He stretched out the heavens: . . . He maketh lightnings for the rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of His treasuries."

"And God said unto Moses, 'I am that I am.'" "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and His Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. . . . I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am the Lord, that doeth all these things." "Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and His Maker: . . . I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded." "O Lord . . . wonderful are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see mine imperfect substance, and in Thy book were all my members written, which day by day were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." "The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty giveth me life."

"Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." "For though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly."

Now though the prophets bring argument abundantly to bear upon the practical application of this conception of God, the conception itself was evidently not obtained by any process of reasoning, as was that of the Greeks; but by some form of personal experience, which we may call intuition, vision, inspiration, revelation, as we will; but which had two marked characteristics; in the first place producing the certain conviction of its being an actual experience of fact; and in the second place making an absolute claim upon the whole personality of its subject for response, upon his moral and spiritual as well as his intellectual nature.

"God called unto him . . . and he said, Here am I. And He said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. . . . And Moses hid his face for he was afraid to look upon God. . . . And the Lord said, I will send

thee unto Pharaoh." "The Lord came and stood and called, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel said, Speak; for Thy servant heareth . . . and . . . the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh, by the word of the Lord." "The vision of Isaiah . . . which he saw. . . . I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. . . . Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. . . . And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I, send me. And he said, Go. . . ." "The words of Jeremiah . . . to whom . . . the word of the Lord came . . . saying. . . . I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nation. Then said I, Ah, Lord God, behold I cannot speak, for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not I am a child, for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go."

"The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. . . . The word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest. . . . When I saw it I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of

One that spake . . . and the spirit entered into me, when He spake unto me. . . . And He said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel."

The prophet in each case is drawn within the divine circle; he is possessed by the God whom he proclaims, in a way that the Greek philosopher is not. Aristotle elaborates his conception of God, *a priori*, point by point, from without; as Phidias might stroke by stroke have carved a statue of Zeus; and the result is something equally external to himself. And though Plotinus claimed rare moments of mystic experience, his thought, as we have seen, remained Greek, in supposing that perfection must imply remoteness from the world, with all the unreality which this involves. Whereas the God of the prophets is known by them immediately in the very act of inspiring and commanding them. They do not merely know about Him, but they know Him; He is personally present to them as a fact; and they are thereby constituted His organs of communication with the world. They do not move in a metaphysical but in a moral and spiritual atmosphere; they are not primarily concerned with God's attributes, considered in the abstract,

but with His living relation to contemporary men. We can only therefore gather their view of the former from the mode in which they treat the latter; but we can do so with perfect clearness. For there can be no question that throughout their teaching, as sufficiently illustrated by the few passages quoted above, they assume and preach the absolutely unqualified omnipotence of God with its necessary implication of unfettered freedom. "God spake once, and twice I have also heard the same, that power belongeth unto God."

It will follow from this that His only limitations must be self-limitations, and though the prophets do not state this in philosophical terms, they say what implies the same thing in moral and spiritual language. "Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy." "He being full of compassion forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not; yea many a time turned He His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath." This is the recognition of that voluntary self-limitation by the creation of finite freewill, which we considered above. And this leads us to the further thought that self-limitation, so considered, that is,

in its moral aspect, is an important element in our picture of the divine goodness. For it is so in human morality: the man who can bear with infinite patience the 'contradiction of sinners' against himself, in the hope of leading them to ultimate reformation, and again the man who can stoop with truest sympathy to the level of the weak and ignorant and foolish, and by his condescension raise their state, both these characters stand high in moral excellence. And it is on this analogy that the prophets picture the operation of divine love. Indeed it is here that the root of the whole matter lies; the moral being the cause of the metaphysical attribute. God, if one may so speak, does not love because it is His nature to limit Himself, but He limits Himself because it is His nature to love. And Aristotle's error arose from his inverting this order of thought. He conceived of God as supreme reason, and since any emotional relationship would, in his view, impair this, he ruled it out, and left God to be the object indeed, but not the subject of universal love, with no bridge, therefore, between Himself and the world.

Now it is easy, with our modern psychological method, to represent the Jewish monotheism, the

prophetic conception of God, as the result of a process of thinking, a subjective process, which was gradually refined and purified with the progress of the ages. But we must bear in mind that it did not so present itself to the prophets themselves; to them it was an actual experience, a veritable revelation,—"The word of the Lord came unto me"; and it was in this mode of presentation that, as a fact of history, it entered and influenced the world. We may vindicate the argument by which it is subsequently justified; but we must remember that it did not first appear as argument, but as fact.

And the same is the case with all the New Testament teaching, through which the conception in question finally passed into the theology of the Church. Christ indeed, as we have seen, employs the argument from man to God; not, however, to prove an hypothesis that might be open to question, but merely to illustrate an assured truth with which His hearers were already familiar. "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."

His presentation of the divine Fatherhood is the prophetic presentation, deepened and amplified; and equally takes the unqualified nature of its sovereignty for granted as a matter of course. And St. Paul speaks to the same effect: "The God that made the world and all things therein, He, being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is He served by men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He Himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and He made of one every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation." And again, expressly appropriating the language of Isaiah: "Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counsellor? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things." And similarly His self-limitation is implied, as by the prophets. "The times of ignorance God overlooked." "The long-suffering of God waited." But indeed it is superfluous to quote passages from the New Testament; for by the Christian era the prophetic controversy with polytheism was long past

and over, and its victory achieved; their doctrine of the divine sovereignty is part of the atmosphere in which we move, and is only further developed in the direction of love, while in this development the whole New Testament, with its teaching of the Incarnation, is occupied. "In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." "Who being in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea the death of the cross." Here again we are confronted not with argument but with fact. For as the prophets had proclaimed the divine sovereignty and care for men, not in terms of reasoning, but in terms of personal experience, so the Incarnate Lord revealed the divine love in His own person. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

"I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly. I am the Good Shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep." . . . "This commandment received I from my Father." And it is in turn their personal experience of this revelation that the apostles attest. "This beginning of miracles did Jesus, . . . and His disciples believed on Him." "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father." "That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands have handled . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." "This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses." "We are witnesses of all things which He did, both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. . . . Him God raised up . . . and gave Him to be made manifest . . . unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead." "Last of all He appeared to me also."

Thus the conception of God as wholly sovereign, and free in His relation to the world, with its necessary corollary that His apparent limitations are voluntary self-limitations, due, in

the last analysis, to His attribute of love, is of Jewish and Christian origin. It follows the analogy of human personality,—the only analogy which we possess,—and is therefore more defensible in argument than any other speculation upon the subject. Yet it did not enter the world in an argumentative way, but according to the belief of its recipients, as a direct revelation; in the one way, that is to say, which would be most natural if it were actually true. For "no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost."

CHAPTER IX

MIRACLES AND MODERN THOUGHT

THE denial of miracles has, usually, in the past, come from the opponents of Christianity, and been urged among the reasons for its rejection. But we are faced in the present day by a new situation, due to the denial of miracles, in an apologetic interest, by certain Christians; with a view to harmonize their Christianity with the supposed requirements of modern thought. It may be worth while, therefore, to consider the bearing of what has been said above upon this particular position.

I have endeavoured before now to call attention to the great ambiguity of such phrases as 'modern thought' and the 'modern mind.' They are incapable of any really stable or permanent definition; because they vary with the idiosyncrasy of their particular employer for the time being, and denote whatever opinion or

trend of opinion he may happen to consider to be the most up-to-date, and assured of future supremacy. And it is not too much to say that one may find this claim urged, in the present day, in behalf of various quite incompatible points of view, in each case begging the question in their favour. We must not, therefore, be too readily impressed by appeals to the authority of the modern mind.

Now the particular phase of modern thought which underlies and colours the critical reconstruction of the gospel history is the opinion that miracles have been discredited for ever, with the consequence that if Christianity is to be preserved to the world, it must be disencumbered of its miraculous element. But, if there is any truth in what has been said above, this view of miracles is in no way entitled to call itself modern, in any exclusive sense; as if, for instance, it were the latest conclusion, on which all thinking men were agreed. We have referred to its first and ablest expression in Spinoza, and shown how immediately Spinozism provoked a reaction in the interest of individuality and freedom, inaugurating a series of controversies that have continued ever since,

without yet having attained, by general consent, to a last word. But the latest important attack upon miracles is not really being made to-day. It was made half a century ago, when some of the leading men of science were materialists, and were attempting to account for all things by a process of purely material evolution, which left no room for God, immortality, or freedom. And those who nowadays hold miracles suspect represent a survival of this opinion which is already somewhat out of date; while the philosophy which made it logical has been generally abandoned. For it was at once argued against these materialists of the last century that physical science is essentially abstract, and must be so as the necessary condition of its own successful pursuit. It leaves out of account, and must leave out of account everything which does not exclusively belong to the material order; and can only attain to success in answering the physical question 'how' by ignoring the metaphysical question 'why' the world exists. And having eliminated all spiritual considerations from the beginning of its work it naturally does not find them at its close. It simply examines physical facts with a view to ascertaining their

physical results; of course, therefore, when it sweeps the heavens with its telescope it can find no God. Materialism, however, forgets this abstract nature of its own basis, and so out of true science makes a false philosophy. But the world of thought has moved forward, and many things have happened since Tyndall delivered his Belfast address. New properties of matter have been discovered which considerably modify the somewhat crude conceptions of it that were current fifty years ago; we see energy behind atoms, and energy is suggestive of will. Facts have been observed in biology, and still more in psychology, which seem to indicate, in the opinion of many scientific men, the operation of guiding intelligence behind the physical order, while the therapeutic influence of mental initiative, in one form or another, upon bodily conditions is coming to be more widely recognized than it ever was before. And it is probably no exaggeration to say that most modern men of science would be among the foremost to recognize both the limited and abstract nature of all specialized study, and the possibility of an ultimately spiritual interpretation of the world. There is certainly, at the

present moment, greater readiness to grant that "there are more things in heaven and earth . . . than are dreamed of in our philosophy."

Now all this may not necessitate our believing in miracles, but it, at least, provides a philosophy which admits of their possible occurrence, in place of one which ruled them, *a priori*, out of court. And our contention is that the Christian critics who approach their work with a prepossession against miracles are really still living under the influence and impetus of opinions which came into vogue with the last recrudescence of materialism, and which have necessarily lost much of their force with its decay. For often as the point has been emphasized, there are still critical writers to be found who appear never adequately to have realized that the question of miracles is essentially a philosophical one. It is never the recorded evidence, but the philosophical presuppositions with which we regard, and in regarding qualify the recorded evidence that determines our point of view, and therefore, in the last analysis, our critical conclusions. But principles which, as a matter of history, certainly owed their recent prominence to their logical connexion with a dominant materialism, cannot but lose value, as

canons of criticism, when their philosophical basis is gone. They have, in fact, been so long in the air that their precise pedigree has come to be forgotten, with the result that they are assumed to be final deliverances of modern thought, rather than of a particular element in that thought which is already ceasing to be modern.

Moreover, the question may be raised whether it can ever be legitimate to apply canons borrowed from physical science to the investigation of human history. Does not such a method of procedure, *ipso facto*, involve a relapse into materialism, a return to the time when men dreamed that, with sufficient knowledge, all human action could be explained, and a science of history in consequence be constructed? Whereas, if there is any truth in what has gone before, this is the very opposite of the real case. For it is only in the lowest ranks of being that uniformity reigns, and it can be safely taken for granted that crystal will reproduce the form of crystal; while, with every step upward, as we have seen, there is an increase of variety and freedom, which reaches its climax in man. History, therefore, human history, is always new; it never really repeats itself; for its every component agent is a fresh individual with

a character and destiny all his own. A saint, a sinner, or a genius may arise at any moment to falsify our surest generalizations. And as the future cannot be scientifically predicted, neither can the past be critically reconstructed by application of the current categories of to-day. Other men in other ages had other minds than ours, and there will always lurk a fallacy in the attempt to translate them into the language that we speak.

> My own East!
> How nearer God we were! He glows above
> With scarce an intervention, presses close
> And palpitatingly His soul o'er ours!
> We feel Him, nor by painful reason know!
> The everlasting minute of creation
> Is felt there; now it is as it was then;
> All changes at His instantaneous will,
> Not by the operation of a law
> Whose maker is elsewhere at other work;
> His hand is still engaged upon His world.
> Man's praise can forward it, man's prayer suspend,
> For is not God all-mighty?

Is the critical apparatus of our modern library at all competent to discover how a man with such a mind as this would have behaved in some crisis of the remote past; or, if we retain our belief in providence, how God would have dealt with such a character; what the incidence of circumstance

upon him would have been? Indeed we may go further and ask whether any attempt to reconstruct the past from the present is not inconsistent with that view of providence which the Incarnation demands. Spinoza with his exaggerated estimate of the necessity of natural laws was quite consistent in depreciating the comparative importance of mankind, as being altogether too insignificant to interfere with the majestic process of the universe. And all similar exaltation of natural law must logically lead to the same conclusion. But the religion of the Incarnation is founded upon the exact reverse of this position. "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." "For though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly." "Who is like unto the Lord our God that hath His seat on high, that humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in earth. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the needy from the dunghill." Such is the prelude, in the noblest Judaism, for the fuller

revelation of the New Testament. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." "Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification." The intense importance of man to God is the moral of the whole great drama; and this is further emphasized by contrast with the lower orders of creation. "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you." "Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they?" But if all this be the case, it follows that in every generation the fact of primary significance must have been not its consequence upon the past, nor its preparation for the future, but the present relation of its living members to God. And if so, we should expect this relation to dominate the situation. We should, that is to say, expect God to deal with men in the precise way which their stage of development made most possible; to address them in the language that they could best understand. Consequently, His method of dealing with ourselves of to-day would be no

adequate criterion of His methods in the past. We sometimes say that God has often guided men by means of illusion on to truth; and we should remember that such illusion is probably inevitable to minds of such finite capacity and partial experience as those of men; with the consequence that our modern exaltation of natural law may after all be no less illusory than what we are apt to consider the crude ideas of our animistic ancestors. When, therefore, we are bidden, as in a recent pamphlet by a distinguished critic, "to go back behind the narratives that have come down to us and to apply to them the standards of our own age, which in the treatment of evidence are more exacting," we may feel considerable doubt as to the value of the conclusions to which such a procedure may lead.

These considerations raise the whole question of the limitations of historical criticism. Historical criticism is now commonly called a science, and, as such, we have need to emphasize its abstract character, precisely as we emphasized that of physical science, a generation ago. For it is, in fact, equally abstract, though with a notable difference in the quality of its abstraction. For it is comparatively easy to make abstraction

of the chemical atoms, or electric discharges or other object matter of a physical science, to isolate it from any context which is not of its own kind, and more particularly from any *a priori* or teleological considerations. But a book is a human document, whose context therefore is humanity—humanity with all the problems which its existence and history arouses. To make adequate abstraction of a book, therefore, is a far more difficult proceeding. And when that book is a religious book, which by the very nature of its content carries us at once into immediate contact with problems which lie outside space and time, the character of the task becomes extremely complex. We may isolate and study the various aspects of such a book, its literary style, or linguistic peculiarities, or portrait of its author. But the book itself is another matter; for it has, especially if it be a religious book, a relation not only to man but also to God. It represents part of a life's work that has been devoted to His service, so much of talent used, so much of fruit borne, so much of the Father's business done; and as such, has been both primarily inspired and subsequently blessed by God. And all this, of course, is in an exceptional degree true of the

books of the New Testament. They have been prominent among God's chosen instruments for His providential government of mankind, and, as such, have been part and parcel of the world's most vital movement for two thousand years, read, marked, learned, incorporated into the very hearts and souls of men, to brace them in temptation, console them in sorrow, chasten them in joy, guide them through life, and illuminate their death with gleams of the light that radiates from the unseen world.

Now it is in the form in which we possess them, and as traditionally interpreted by the Church, that these books have really lived and done their work. And when we withdraw them from the market-place, the throbbing centre of human interest, into a library remote from the world, and there analyse them apart from all thought of what they have actually been, and actually done, the lives they have inspired and the death-beds they have soothed, we can only arrive at very partial results. Take, for instance, the case of the fourth gospel, with whose various difficulties we are all by this time sufficiently familiar. Its difference from the synoptic record is of course obvious at once; and the hypothesis

that it really represents the result of philosophical reflection, dramatically cast into historic form, by a writer who was too late to be historically accurate, is a plausible enough solution of the problem to which this diversity gives rise. But it is a typical specimen of an abstract theory, such as an ingenious critic, whose thoughts were confined to the four walls of his study, might well invent. What it explains is not the fourth gospel of history, but an imaginary fourth gospel of the critic's mind. For the fourth gospel of history is, and from its first appearance always has been, a living and pulsing part of Christianity itself; and as such is illustrated by that vast context by which every detail of Christianity is surrounded and qualified, as we have already had occasion, in another connexion, to point out. Consider but a portion of that context, namely, the two thousand years of the Church's existence, with all which that existence has meant for the world at large, as well as for the separate souls of men. The experience of those two thousand years alone is amply sufficient to create an overwhelming presumption that the message of the Christian Church has after all been true, that the Incarnation is a fact, and that the central fact of our planet's

history. But if this be so, and there is consequently nothing to be explained away in the fourth gospel,—no later development of theology than the synoptic writers already knew,—the reasonableness of the Christian tradition at once returns to the front. That tradition is to the effect that the disciple whom Jesus loved was none other than John the son of Zebedee and brother of James; and that he wrote his gospel, with that special insight into his Master's character which only love could give, and love quickened by the Spirit, of whom he alone records the promise that it should lead him into all truth; and that he wrote in extreme old age to refute false doctrine that had grown with time; naturally therefore exhibiting the characteristic combination of memory and forgetfulness which old age brings; failing often to distinguish or to make clear to his readers the distinction between the words of the Lord Himself and the comments on them of a mind, which had been gradually conformed, by more than fifty years of meditation, to the fashion of the Spirit of Christ. All this is a natural and lifelike and human hypothesis, when compared with the critical suggestions that have been made to supersede it; and, if it be true, we have here

attested, at first hand, by an eye-witness, several of the most exceptional of all the gospel miracles, and least patient of explanation by any minimising process; together with Christ's own appeal to their attestation of His mission from the Father. "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."

We are not, of course, here arguing out the Johannine problem, which would require a volume, and has often been argued adequately before; but merely utilizing it to illustrate the distinction between the abstract and concrete treatment of a book. Our point is that the St. John of tradition has been a living force, and vitally connected with the Christian life of after ages; while the hypothetical Platonist of the second century could not have been either of these things.

It is the same with the extreme critical treatment of the Acts of the Apostles; though this, it must be admitted, has now been abandoned by all sober thinkers. The Acts has been regarded, through the ages, as the work of a *bona fide*

historian, intimately linked with the missionary labours of St. Paul,—"Luke the beloved physician," "Only Luke is with me." And as such it has stood at the head of that long list of Christian writings of those who have borne their share in the preaching of the gospel by recording its history; that history which is so essential a part of the cumulative evidence with which it confronts the world. It is the earliest epoch of Christianity, described by one who was himself among its founders; who had shared the perils of St. Paul, and seen the shadow of Peter passing by. And as such it is an integral part of the Christian tradition, an important element in the preaching of the gospel to the world, a factor in the furtherance of the coming of the kingdom of God. It coheres with all the rest of the great Christian context; it is a living concrete whole. And as a matter of fact the most recent research has, as we all know, amply vindicated the traditional ascription of the Acts to an accurate historian of the first century. But it is not long since the theory of Baur and his school was in the ascendant; which regarded the Acts as an imaginary picture drawn in the second century to support the growing spirit of catholicism by

representing the parties in the early Church as less widely divided than they had actually been. And again more recently there have been attempts to deny the real unity of the book, by representing it as a redaction of several earlier writings of most arbitrary invention. Here again then there is the same contrast between the life-like and concrete and the abstract and artificial; between the book which has actually worked in the world and the book which has been hypothetically created in the study. And the like again may be said of the attribution to other and unknown authors of the letters that have carried down the ages the great gospel of St. Paul.

All these books, in other words, and their kindred, have a great spiritual connotation which can never be made a matter of scientific analysis, but which must always profoundly qualify the results of that analysis, before their true appreciation can be attained. The last word upon them lies less with the judgment of the critic than with the insight of the saint. And this is precisely similar to the way in which the physiological analysis of the human body has to be qualified, by metaphysical and moral considerations that lie wholly outside physiology, before any adequate

notion can be acquired of the true nature of man. Such is the necessary limitation of all abstract sciences, and of literary criticism, if it is to be called a science, among the rest. And in the face of this limitation it may be questioned whether it be ever really possible "to go behind the narratives that have come down to us and to apply to them the standards of our own age, which in the treatment of evidence are more exacting." For this is in fact to perform something very like the precise operation which in the case of many bygone historians we are apt to criticize adversely; since, when a bygone historian is describing events which took place at a remote age from his own, we are wont to consider him untrustworthy from his liability to read the categories of his own day into the past. The criticism of the Old Testament will suggest many instances in which this principle has, rightly or wrongly, been applied. But in the case before us, St. Paul and St. Luke record contemporary events, most of which occurred within their own experience. They tell us, in fact, what their personal experience actually was, in their own eyes. While we, who are remote and immensely remote from their day, are bidden to "apply to

them the standards of our own age" in order to determine what their experience ought to have been. And to say that we are justified in such a proceeding, when our predecessors were not, on account of the intrinsic superiority and finality of our categories, is, if there be any truth in the foregoing pages, to beg a very large question indeed.

To return then to our main point: St. Luke was an intellectual and educated man, with a keen sense of and desire for historical accuracy; leading him as he tells us to seek information from those who "from the beginning were eye-witnesses." Now St. Luke not only records many of the miracles of Christ, including His resurrection, but in the Acts he recounts other miracles, wrought through "faith in His name," which would doubtless also have been made matter of conscientious inquiry. "Many wonders and signs," he says, "were done by the apostles." "And Stephen, full of grace and power, wrought great wonders and signs among the people." "And the multitude gave heed with one accord unto the things that were spoken by Philip, when they heard and saw the signs which he did. For from many of those which had unclean spirits they came out,

crying with a loud voice: and many that were palsied, and that were lame, were healed." "He continued with Philip, and beholding signs and great miracles wrought he was amazed." "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: insomuch that unto the sick were carried away from his body handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out."

The simplicity and directness of these narratives does not suggest superstitious credulity; the occurrences in question are not even emphasized; they are merely stated, like any other facts, with no note of the marvel-monger about them; while in the case of the facts recorded in our last quotation, they, at least, must have rested upon the immediate personal experience of St. Luke, who would have been exceptionally qualified to criticize cases of healing which transcended the known practice of the day.

And what of St. Paul himself? Emotional, enthusiastic, mystic he may be, but none the less a keenly intellectual thinker. We have already seen how St. Paul, when reasoning about the resurrection, clinches his arguments by a statement of his own personal experience: "Last of

all, He was seen of me also." But further than this, he speaks of the continuation of miracles in the Church as a fact with which his hearers were perfectly familiar.

"To one is given through the spirit the word of wisdom . . . to another gifts of healing, in the one spirit, and to another working of miracles."

"God hath set some in the Church, first apostles . . . then miracles . . . are all workers of miracles?"

"He therefore that supplieth to you the spirit and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

Here then we have one of the master minds of human history, together with his intellectual, educated friend, speaking of facts within their own experience, and to an audience with whom that experience had obviously been shared. And certain of these facts they represent as exceptional, differing from the daily order of events, striking, wonderful, miraculous, and due to the particular action of God. We may say, 'applying the standards of our own age,' that in so doing they were mistaken, and that what really happened was something other than this. But, if so, it was not this hypothetical reality, but the actual mis-

take, which exercised the dynamic influence upon them, and inspired their lives. They viewed the facts in question, that is to say, in the light of the intellectual atmosphere wherein they habitually lived, and it was by this view and no other that the effect of these facts upon them was determined.

In a word, the Christian religion was first preached and accepted by men who profoundly believed in miracles; and it has been handed down the ages by men who held that primitive belief to be true. It has always been presented as an historical religion, that is to say, founded upon events which happened, and contemplating others yet to come. It is the religion of Jesus Christ "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures."

Such is the time-honoured summary of the earthly life of Jesus Christ which has descended by tradition through the ages; and it has always been held to affirm the literal occurrence of its

central miracles; in no metaphorical or symbolic language, such as we inevitably use when, in speaking of the spiritual world, and "the light that no man can approach unto," we go on to say, "ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father." And the attempt to eliminate these miracles, in the supposed interest of a more rational Christianity, apart from its other difficulties, involves a serious misconception of what the Christian Faith has historically been. It would substitute an ideal for an eventful religion, a theory of the wise and prudent for the revelation to babes.

APPENDIX I

THE NATURE OF MAN

It is always difficult to interpret any phrase in which the word "nature" occurs, for it is a term of so many different meanings and shades of meaning that we can seldom be sure whether any two persons are using it in precisely the same sense. But there is one broad distinction between two of its applications to which Aristotle called attention, in the early days of thought, and which it is essential to clear thinking that we should always keep in mind. The term is sometimes employed to denote the original state or primitive condition of a thing, as contrasted with its subsequent developments; and sometimes on the other hand to denote its final perfection, as the result of those developments, or in other words, what it is destined to become. Thus, in the former sense, we contrast a state of nature with a state of civilization, or nature with art, or, as in a famous chapter of the *Imitation of Christ*, nature with grace. Whereas, in the latter sense, we speak of civilized life and artistic and scientific and spiritual

development as natural to man, or the fulfilment of his true nature; meaning that it is the inevitable realization of what from the first man had it in him to become. And so, says Aristotle, "man is by nature a citizen (φύσει πολιτικός) since that is the goal to which his progress tends. These two uses of the term have an underlying connexion, but on the surface they are in sharp contrast; and we must always be clear as to which of the two, when using the word, we have in mind.

Now, when we study the nature of man, either with a view to his general education, or more particularly to his moral and spiritual training, it is with the second sense of the term that we are concerned. His original ancestry and primitive condition are not then to our point. What we want to know is the kind and degree of development which his make and constitution admits; the conditions of his fullest realization, and the methods of their attainment; all that he has it within him, potentially, to become. And for this kind of knowledge we have two main sources; psychology, in its widest sense, and history; the analysis, that is to say, of human faculties, to see how they work, and what work they are capable of doing; and the recorded experience of what human beings in the past have actually been and done.

Psychologically or analytically considered, then, man is a person, as distinct from a mere animal;

that is to say a self-conscious being, a subject that can become its own object, and "has power to say I am I"; a self that, in Dante's language, "turns itself on itself," and recognizes itself as a self. And this self is intellectual, emotional, volitional. It thinks, it feels, it wills; three functions which, though distinct in the abstract, are intimately and almost indistinguishably blended in actual life. But so far as we can distinguish them, we may say that feeling or emotion is the great motive power in human nature. The dawn of consciousness, we are told, is elicited by response to feelings; and the goal of every life is satisfaction of one kind or another; while satisfaction is an emotional state. It may range from the satisfaction of bodily appetite to the satisfaction of social ambition, or intellectual curiosity, or again to that of a good conscience, and benevolent activity and communion with God. We may call it, accordingly, pleasure, or success, or knowledge, or goodness, or love, or holiness. But, whatever the means of its attainment, satisfaction is the end we seek.

Again, as being rational self-conscious beings, we do not seek our satisfaction blindly, but consciously. We can present the various kinds of satisfaction to our minds as objects, or contemplate ourselves as likely to be satisfied in one or other of various ways. We can make the future state of satisfied emotion which we do not at

present feel an object of contemplation. This leads to desire for its attainment, and this again to a resolution or determination of our will to attain it.

Thus our will is not so much a separate faculty, co-ordinate with reason and feeling, as a particular attitude of our entire self. It is the whole self in action, the self identifying itself with a particular object of pursuit, realizing itself in a particular way, determining itself to a particular course of conduct. And when we say that our will is free, we do not mean that we can act without motives; for we must always obey the motive which is strongest at the moment, as the determinists are fond of telling us. But our freedom consists in the ability to add weights to the scale, or perhaps, more accurately speaking, to shift the place of the weights in the scale, of our own accord, and make one motive stronger than another. By so doing we determine ourselves, instead of being determined from without, and by successive acts of such self-determination, we gradually form our habits, and thus fashion our character. For, as Marcus Aurelius said, "the soul is dyed the colour of its desires."

Our character therefore depends upon the kind of satisfaction that we seek; and to the question, "What is the true and natural satisfaction of man?" different schools of moral philosophy have given different answers. Hedonism, or the

pursuit of pleasure, the lowest answer in the scale, could never now be advocated by serious moralists, as it was by some in pre-Christian days. But in practical life it is still disastrously common. Yet the first necessity of a satisfaction is that it should satisfy; and in this respect hedonism conspicuously fails. For pleasures, when pursued for their own sake, rapidly pall, and need to be stimulated by an increasing excitement which quickly destroys the very capacity that it seeks to sate; and the Cyrenaic ends a Cynic, railing at the world. And what is true of hedonism is true also of all pursuit of self-interest, by whatever name it may be called. The more the self is gratified the more it is debased. And that because the whole attempt rests upon a false estimate of the nature of man. For though a person is, on the one side, a self, an independent centre of being, he is, on the other side, much more than this, for he is essentially and constitutionally social; "naturally a citizen," as Aristotle said. And, as such, he can only grow and develop through relationship to other persons, to whom he is bound by the mutual interchange of sympathy and service. He gives and he receives; but his whole value to society, and consequently his worth and dignity and place in the world, depends not upon what he receives, but upon what he gives. He grows indeed by what he receives, but only on the condition that

he receives in order to enlarge his power of giving. A miser may be worth a million, but he is worth nothing else; he has no value for the world. Hence it is untrue to regard personal and altruistic interests as antagonistic and needing to be more or less artificially reconciled. For in the last analysis altruism is found to be as essentially involved in man's personality as self-regard.

A man serves his fellow-man then by doing his own work or performing his own function in the world, which Plato so well defines to be "that which he alone can do, or can do best." And from this social service he derives a far higher kind and greater degree of satisfaction than self-seeking in any form can give—a satisfaction that is partly due to the sense of duty done, and partly to the responsive gratitude, and sympathy and love of other men. Thus a person, because he is such, must lose his life to gain it, and find his satisfaction in ministering to the satisfaction of others, who by the like necessity of their nature minister in turn to him.

But even this satisfaction is not final or complete. For we are finite and imperfect, and our nearest and our dearest are finite and imperfect too. And we instinctively need something more than they can ever give;—contact, intercourse, communion with a Being who is real and permanent and perfect; Another, whom we can

absolutely trust, to satisfy all the aspirations that He has created, as well for holiness in this life, as for whatever that may be that shall constitute our blessedness hereafter. Hence the life of faith and prayer, which not only lifts our inmost self to a higher level, but also ennobles all our service of humanity; since its humblest and simplest acts are then "done as unto the Lord and not unto men," and acquire a new reality and dignity from the fact. While, further, the religious man finds a fuller satisfaction of his social nature in the company of those who like himself are striving to live "as unto the Lord," and who consequently possess that deeper reality and truer capacity for fellowship which that life must inevitably bring. Thus while "honouring all men" he "loves the brotherhood" since it is only within the brotherhood, the company of those who are penetrated and sustained by the divine love, that his own desire for love and sympathy meets its really adequate response.

There are races, of course, in whom the religious sense is dim, and others by whom its promptings are strangely distorted, and thinkers again who deny its correspondence with reality. But it exists, and, as far as we can see, it has always existed, as a general if not universal element in human nature. And its verdict must be true, if the world is to be recognized as rational, since it is the only condition on which the cravings of our

nature can ever be adequately satisfied. "My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God." "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and we are restless till we rest in Thee."

Human nature is thus capable of three kinds of satisfaction: the self-regarding, the social and the spiritual; and of these the third includes and disciplines all that is good in the other two. Meanwhile our personality acts through a bodily organism, akin to that of all other animals, which is intimately connected by brain and nerve with our entire conscious life. Bodily actions tend to repeat themselves through the inclination of nervous currents to follow the line of least resistance, and therefore the path that they have taken before, and hence lead to habits, and so to character. And this character of the body will depend upon whether it dominates or is dominated by the spirit. If the body is indulged and made an end in itself, it soon becomes a prison of the soul; hampering, hindering, fettering, and finally debasing its possessor to worse than an animal state. Whereas, on the other hand, if controlled and disciplined by a resolute will, it may grow to be a wonderfully adequate organ of the spirit. Witness the touch of the musician, the voice of the orator, the eye of the lover or of the leader of men, the hand that wields brush or chisel, the feet that are "beautiful upon the mountains" as they speed on messages of peace; even

the hoary head that is a crown of glory when the tired body that can work no longer lingers on to radiate around it unimpassioned love. But the body as we inherit it is full of evil taints and tendencies; and to "keep it under and bring it into subjection" to the spirit is no easy task; and one which, in average humanity, cannot be accomplished without religion. Here again, therefore, it is the religious, the spiritual, man who exhibits human nature at its best.

And then when we turn to history, which has well been called "philosophy teaching by example," we find its witness to the same effect. For the highest product of history is the saint. The pioneer, the patriot, the statesman, the philosopher, the artist, the man of science, all in their several vocations benefit their race. But as an exponent of human nature at its highest the saint, the prophet, the servant of God conspicuously outstrips them all. Of course, in saying this one is making abstraction of the different characters; for the statesman or the artist or other secular worker may in actual life at the same time be the saint. But if so, it will be in his saintliness that his real supremacy consists.

In the first place in his sense of communion with God, and consequent endeavour to do God's work in the world, the saint possesses the highest kind and degree of personal satisfaction, and one which conspicuously outweighs all the tribulations

to which he may be exposed:—"the peace that passeth all understanding," "the joy that no man taketh from him," "the hope full of immortality." The agnostic who does his duty to the utmost has also his satisfaction; but it is only the best that his creed admits of, not the best possible to man, nor comparable to that which, as history in every age assures us, has belonged to the really religious life, as we see it in St. Paul, or St. Bernard, or St. Francis, or St. Catherine, or St. Theresa, or St. Francis de Sales.

Then again, in real use to the world the saint has the pre-eminence. The patriot may win freedom for his fellows, the artist illuminate their life, the man of science multiply their comforts and increase their mastery of matter. But all these things are of little avail without moral and spiritual progress; and that is the work of the religious man. For with the average of mankind religion and morality go together, and no moral progress is made except under spiritual sanctions. Whatever philosophical optimists may dream about the future, such is emphatically the verdict of universal history in the past. And we can see abundant reason why it should be so; for it is not so much the knowledge of our duty as the will to do it, the courage of our opinions, that promotes progress; and no force is strong enough to inspire this courage, in ordinary men, but the moral dynamic of religious belief. It is easy enough indeed to

point to the errors of the official representatives of religion in the past, and suggest that morality has advanced in spite of them. But this only means that the spirit of our religion is greater than that of its temporary ministers; and to that spirit we owe all the immeasurable distance that separates our Christian ethics from those of the ancient world.

Nor is morality a thing by itself: it is the condition of efficiency, both in body and mind; and to promote morality is therefore to promote efficiency in every department of life. Every worker is really efficient in proportion to his morality; and thus the religious man in contributing to moral progress forwards the entire development of the world. If there were any exception to this—if any kind of human activity were really independent of religion—it might be thought to be physical science; considering the strained relations that have often been supposed to exist between the two. Yet there is undoubted truth in the contention of Newman's sermon on "the philosophical temper first enjoined by the Gospel." He there points out the striking contrast between the moral tone and temper of ancient and modern philosophers and men of science, considered as a class; and maintains that "Scripture was, in matter of fact, the first to describe and inculcate that single-minded, modest, cautious, and generous spirit which was, after a

long time, found so necessary in the prosecution of philosophical research." And it is impossible to read the history of scientific progress and the biographies of its promoters without being struck by the correctness of this conclusion. The supposed exception is no exception at all.

Briefly to resume then: the analysis of human faculties and the study of human history witness to the same effect. It is the nature of man to find his truest satisfaction and fullest realization in the life of conscious communion with God, and in the social service and social sympathy, which that communion involves; in other words the life of love,—love of God and man.

And this thought carries us up to the threshold of the Incarnation. For though in speaking of religion above we have naturally had the Christian religion in mind, yet the conclusion of the foregoing analysis is one which would be accepted by all Theists, even if they did not believe in the Incarnation. At the same time the very fact that this is so, the fact that Theism or natural religion carries us so far, is one of our strongest reasons for believing in the Incarnation; as showing its congruity with the deepest need of our race. And for those who do believe it, the Incarnation throws new light on the whole nature of man. For it not only confirms the truth of our previous conclusion, but it carries that truth further still by exhibiting our human nature as capable, in

one instance, of being personally united to God, and thereby becoming an adequate means of His manifestation to His creatures. Once in history we have before us the picture of a perfect man, and in that picture we see the greatness to which, in such an one, human life and human love may rise. And though we cannot in the case of our Lord disentangle the human completely from the divine, we gather hints that His strictly human nature possessed wonderful capacities, as the result of His perfect and faithful obedience to the will of the Father; as in a lower region we have increased our control of the forces of nature, by increased practice of obedience to their laws.

Finally, the Incarnation points us forward to the day, when "it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Christ and the members of Christ must always differ as the creator and the creature; but with that qualification we can foresee no limit to that "measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" which His Spirit shall, in the far eternity, enable His members to attain. While the will of each being identified with His will must be equally the will of all, and our utmost social capacities therefore be adequately satisfied, in the communion of saints, the kingdom where He rules, to serve whom is to reign (*cui servire est regnare*), and whose only law is love.

APPENDIX II

THE CONFUSION CAUSED BY SIN

MAN is naturally religious; first, in the sense that as a matter of history he has always possessed a religion of one kind or another, the few exceptions that can be quoted being doubtful, and probably due, if true, to degeneration; and secondly, in the sense that it is his true nature to find his highest realization in communion with God. The saint is the highest type of man. And sin is the breach of this communion; it is practical irreligion or irreligion put in practice. The secular world is apt to think more of vices and crimes than of sins; vices or faults which spoil a man's own personality, and crimes or faults which spoil his relation to society. But vices and crimes only are what they are, because in the last analysis they are sins, or breaches of divine law, separating us from God. All unrighteousness is sin, says St. John, and "sin is lawlessness," the breach of God's law by man's will. Hence the fundamental place of sin in man's character. It strikes not at the surface

but at the very root of our life. It is a disease at the very core of our being. For it is our nature, as we have seen, to live in relation to God; a relation which may range from that simple fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom, to the perfect love of saints which casteth out fear, but must always be a relation, a conscious reference. And the sinner breaks this relation; he ceases to be theocentric, as if a planet should break from its orbit round the sun; and he disorganizes every function of his being as the result.

It is a familiar fact that the saintliest characters are most acutely aware of their own sinfulness; and men of the world attribute this to pious scrupulosity. But it is nothing of the kind. It is not scrupulosity. It is superior insight. For the saint has measured his strength with sin, and knows the power of his enemy. Whereas the average man of the world has not done this, and tends, therefore, to underestimate the significance of sin, precisely in proportion as he is blinded by its influence. We all know the tendency to judge our own besetting sins more leniently than those of others, even when of precisely similar kind. And this blinding power, this deceitfulness of sin—"Ye shall not surely die"—is further assisted in the present day by intellectual theories that minimize its magnitude. It is of the utmost importance, therefore,

that we should endeavour to realize the power of sin, the amount of force that it exerts, as exhibited both in the extent of its range and the intensity of its action.

Consider first its intensity as seen in its effect, when unchecked, upon individual character; which may be most easily illustrated by sensuality, not as being worse than other sins, but as more open to the eye. Sins of sense have slight beginnings, like the almost innocent greediness of childhood—"I did but taste a little honey"—they are often enough disguised in a roseate atmosphere of romance. *Sed respice finem!* "And lo I must die." Let them take their course unhindered and we all know the result—the gradual but increasingly rapid ruin of the bodily organism, debasement of imagination, degradation of intellect, effacement of conscience, paralysis of will—spiritual, moral, physical corruption. The picture is too sadly familiar to need further emphasis, but it is evidence enough of the appalling power of sin. And though the action of spiritual sin may be less obvious, the harm that it works is worse, for it sinks men, in the end, not into animals, but into fiends. Ambition was the sin of Richard, as drawn by Shakespeare; and remember the words of his remorse:

> My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain.

Perjury, perjury in the highest degree,
Murder, stern murder, in the direst degree;
All several sins, all used in each degree,
Throng to the bar crying all—Guilty! guilty!
I shall despair: there is no creature loves me;
And if I die no soul shall pity me;
Nay, wherefore should they? since that I myself
Find in myself no pity to myself.

Such is the terrible power of single sins unchecked, upon character. But, as the downward course continues, sins no longer remain single: they change their nature; they unmask and show themselves to be only parts of an awfully concatenated whole. The sin of sense becomes a sin of malice. The genial pleasure-lover must have money and becomes a thief and a swindler. Tito Melema from mere softness is driven on to commit murder. The terrible "taking to himself seven others" is always going on.

Such is the direct and primary power of sin upon the individual. But "no man liveth to himself." Man is a social being and cannot fall without involving others in his ruin. Not only does his example drag others downward, but when he has fallen far enough he becomes the active tempter of others; for evil has become his good, the deliberate object of his choice, and as a social being he must seek companionship in evil. And so arises the dreadful reality of what we fallaciously call the criminal class;—fallaciously because the phrase would seem to confine to one

rank in the social order an evil that exists in different degrees behind the surface of all ;—hand joined in hand to work wickedness.

And this social character of sin, its pervasive omnipresence in society, invests it with a fresh power, the power of opposition to good. Prophets, patriots, philanthropists, reformers, teachers, all who strive to fight the world's evil or to forward the world's good, know the terrible extent of this power,—the heavy, obstructive, resourceful, relentless, persistent opposition of sinful interests that close again like parted water round their every effort in the cause of right.

Further, from this social ubiquity follows another characteristic of sin, which again tends to increase its power : and that is its elusiveness, the way in which it escapes notice. Sinners, as we have seen, are habitually unaware of their sinfulness in proportion to its extent. And the same is the case with society at large. It revolts from the more startling vices and crimes, but forgets its own inherent sinfulness and consequent complicity in the ultimate causation of all such things. So much that, in the last analysis, is connected with sin has passed into the ordinary routine of life as to blind us to the connexion. Take, for instance, the professions that men follow in the world, honourable and upright vocations, like the army or the navy or the law. How little we remember that the presupposition of their

existence is sin. "Whence come wars and whence come fightings among you? Come they not hence even of your pleasures that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not; ye kill, and covet, and cannot obtain; ye fight and war." Or, again, there are whole branches of literature of which the same might be said—history, drama, romance. What are the situations with which they deal but the complications and entanglements introduced into the world by sin. Banish these and Othello's occupation would be gone. And if this is true of what rank among the noblest spheres of human activity, it is, of course, much more true of that vast mass of the world's business which manages to pass muster in the public eye, yet is intimately tainted by sinful motives, and sinful methods of attainment. All this merely means that sin is a much larger element in the very warp and woof of our daily life than we are at all aware. We are so accustomed to living in a sinful world that our spiritual vision has become atrophied, and we are blind to more than half its sin. But this fact enormously increases the power of sin over us, by throwing us off our guard against its subtler forms of influence, and thus enabling it to creep on us unawares.

And the consideration of society naturally leads us on from the intensive aspect of sin, or the depth to which it penetrates, to the extensive aspect of it, or the width of the area that it covers. And

in no way perhaps is this more readily apparent than when we contrast the ideal with the actual condition of the human race. Man is capable of sanctity, of communion with God, and through that communion of a wonderful development, here and now in this present world, of all his best capacities and powers. He can become a living instrument for the transmission of divine energy to the world, a veritable organ of God. Yet when we look at contemporary life or bygone history, how complete a contrast to this high destiny does it present. Omitting extreme cases, consider the ordinary man, the average representative of human nature, the typical specimen of millions upon millions of mankind. Does he even suggest any latent possibility of sanctity and all that it involves? Is it really true that he has or ever had such a capacity within him? But is it too much to say that the explanation of this strange anomaly is sin? Ignorance and unspiritual environment and adverse heredity may account for much. But all these things are, in the last analysis, due to the influence, through long ages, of that sinful society that we have described above. And when all possible allowance has been made for their operation there still remains the effect of each individual's personal sin. We are assuming merely average sins—those which the average man commits, whether for pleasure or gain or ambition, or from cowardice or sloth or

pride. But average sins of this kind, that have never really been repented of, accumulate in their effect: they blunt the conscience, blur the clearness of the spiritual vision, degrade the tone of the motives, paralyse the will; with the result that the average man makes the "great refusal" of his high destiny, and remains the average man, the ordinary type of his race. Good influences must have been at work, as they perpetually are at work, to prevent further degeneration; but this fact only emphasizes the magnitude of the power which, despite of them, can keep the spiritual level of man so low.

And yet, low as the level of what we should now call average humanity may be, when judged by its ideal standard, it is high when compared with the record of what history has to show us—the lust and violence and cruelty of the empires of old—the immemorial corruption of India—the wild savagery of Africa—or, again, the degradation in the crowded purlieus of our towns to-day.

> The mass of men, whose very souls even now
> Seem to need re-creating,—so they slink
> Worm-like into the mud. . . .
> Whose future we dispose of with shut eyes.

Then, again, sin has incidental and indirect effects, both moral and physical, over society at large, that further emphasize its power. We talk, for instance, of the complexity of life and

of its problems as though they were the inevitable consequences of human development. But apart from sin and its results there would be none of that bewildering complication which so intensifies the stress and strain of our existence. For sins are essentially deeds of darkness. "They come not to the light because their deeds are evil." Sin requires concealment, and so has gradually involved the world in a fog-like atmosphere of insincerity—secret actions, hidden motives, unreal language, self-deceit. Hence arise doubts, difficulties, entanglements, perplexities, misunderstandings, misrepresentations, complicated situations; in which even the most straightforward man can no longer act simply, because the very material with which he has to deal is interpenetrated with lies. We need only picture what policy, or social intercourse, or commerce would be in a world whose every member thought no evil and spoke the truth from his heart, to realize how profoundly sin has complicated life for us all.

And then there is the long entail of physical disease and misery and pain that sin, and nothing else than sin, has brought upon our race. We have alluded above, in the case of the individual, to the ruin of the bodily organism by vicious self-indulgence. But when we think of the scale on which this one cause alone has operated, the incalculable sum total of men and women that have been thus ruined, the picture is appalling.

But this is not all, or nearly all. For bodily self-indulgence is not the only sinful cause of bodily disease. Avarice, the greed of gain, in every shape or form, and sloth, that shirks its share of the world's work, have conspired together to produce the abyss of pauperism that involves starvation and disease of every kind, and exposes children, through no fault of their own, to immoral and deadly conditions of life. And yet again, the more spiritual sins, like anger, envy, jealousy, discontent, have, as every physician knows, a fatal reaction on the bodily life, and are fruitful parents of further disease. While finally imbecility and madness, with all their attendant horrors, are demonstrably in many cases due to sin, in the individual or his ancestry; and perhaps, if we could carry our analysis far enough, we should, instead of in many cases, say in all.

Nor does the influence of sin's malign power end even here. For we have still further to remember the effect which the spectacle of all these things has upon the mind; the way in which it tends to perplex and falsify man's judgment of God. "Thou thoughtest wickedly that I am even such an one as thyself." Pessimism and doubt and unbelief have, of course, their subjective causes in the individual character; but they have also undoubtedly an objective cause, a superficial justification, in the miserable picture that the world presents. And that picture is largely the result

of sin. God's permission of sin may be a great mystery; but still it is quite a distinct and distinguishable thing from man's commission of it. But the pessimist forgets or refuses to draw this distinction. He masses together, in one undifferentiated whole, things which we believe to be primarily due to God's agency, like natural catastrophes, with things which we know to be primarily due to man's agency; while, still further, forgetting that God's agency, as we see it here and now, is exercised in, and therefore presumably conditioned by, a sinful world. The sincere man who examines his own history knows how profoundly different his life would have been without sin; how immeasurably greater, brighter, happier, lovelier a thing; and he knows also, by a legitimate inference, that the same must be true of all other men. Moreover, he sees through all the sophistries that masquerade as luck, or fate, or fortune, or heredity, or circumstance; and recognizes that his sin has been due to his fault, his own fault, his own great fault. Consequently, he is aware that the entire picture which the world presents has been marred by man himself,—marred beyond all recognition of what conceivably it might have been. But the majority, probably the great majority, of men are never sincere enough with themselves to read their own interior history aright; and are utterly unable therefore to interpret aright the like sad record when writ large in the wider history of

the world. Hence they credit God with man's misdoings; with evil of which man has been quite demonstrably the immediate cause; and doubt and disbelief and pessimism are the natural result. They begin by hiding themselves from God, and find that in the end they have hidden God from themselves. They can no longer see Him. "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God." Practical irreligion ends in practical atheism; the total frustration of man's chief end, which is, in well-known words, "to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever."

Such are, in outline, some of the ways in which the power of sin is exhibited. But no mere abstract statement upon paper can give us more than a notional apprehension of the facts. It is only when we reflect upon the harm that it has done to ourselves, or come into personal contact with souls which, to the limit of this life, it has ruined, that we gain a partial insight into sin's real malignity. And even then we but touch the fringe of it; for the vast extent of its operation is mercifully beyond our capacity to realize. It is summed up, as we know, by St. John in the terrible words, "the whole world lieth in wickedness," or, "in the evil one";— words that recall the earlier language of the Psalmist: "God looked down from heaven upon the children of men: to see if there were any that would understand and seek after God. But they are all gone out of the way, they

are altogether become abominable: there is also none that doeth good, no, not one."

Now we have seen above that the saintliest men are most keenly aware of this. And the same may be said of the Christian Church, as such. The Christian Church takes a more serious view of sin than any other religion or system of thought. It lays greater stress both upon its awfulness and upon man's personal responsibility for it. But that this view is the true one, and no exaggeration, is sufficiently proved by the fact that the Christian Church alone has successfully grappled with sin. It has exhibited a capacity for the conversion and restoration of sinners that no other religion, or society, or teaching has ever possessed in an equal degree. But the physician who alone can apply the remedy must be the one who has most correctly diagnosed the disease. And the Christian diagnosis affirms sin to be the sole source of human misery; whose fatal power cannot be exaggerated, nor the consequent need for its abolition over-emphasized.

Finally, it should be observed that the fact of this power is not practically affected by our notion of the nature of its origin. On the one hand the Christian Church in bygone ages has generally attributed that origin to superhuman temptation—temptation by the Evil One; and this is a belief that cannot be lightly ignored. For external temptation, in the form of temptation by our

fellow-men, is undoubtedly a *vera causa*; it is a fact which God plainly permits: and if He permits one kind of external temptation, we cannot deny that He may admit another also. While our Lord's language, unless it is to be viewed as symbolical, seems certainly to sanction the belief. On the other hand there is a tendency in the present day, among the students of evolution, to regard the possibility and therefore the practical probability of sin as a necessary stage in the rise of finite self-consciousness. These two views are not perhaps so incompatible as is usually supposed; but the point to be observed about them is this, that they are both accounts of temptation and not of sin. But temptation, however arising, cannot cause sin till it has been accepted by the will. And the power, therefore, that we have been considering, is directly and immediately the power of the human will,—the human will gone wrong; the power of man to ruin his own nature, by breaking that nature's fundamental law, which is to find its only adequate realization in God.

THE END

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